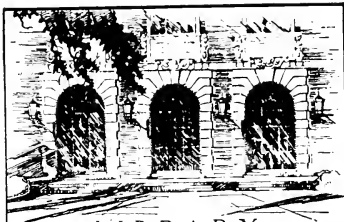


THE HERIOTS

SIR HENRY CUNNINGHAM



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THE HERIOTS



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BY

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'CHRONICLES OF DUSTYPORE,' 'WHEAT AND TARES,' 'THE CÆRULEANS,'
ETC.

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CHAPTER XXXI

THE TROUBLES OF COURTSHIP

‘I would that you were all to me,
You that are just so much, no more :
Nor yours nor mine, nor slave nor free !
Where does the fault lie ? What the core
O’ the wound, since wound must be ?’

DE RENZI’S courtship was not just now a bed of roses to him. He had begun to feel the first chill gusts of the approaching storm. He was feeling already the inconveniences of an unworldly marriage—his father’s cynical disapproval, his mother’s ill-concealed disappointment, his sisters’ uncomplimentary silence about their future relation, the fancied sneers of kind friends at so interesting a lapse into the sentimental. Olivia’s reception by his own relations was, De Renzi felt

bitterly, a foretaste of the family discomforts which awaited his wife and himself in times to come. They froze her with politeness, which was in the circumstances the acme of discourtesy. They dared not insult her, but their behaviour breathed a subtle insolence. There was no attempt at intimacy; no pretence of the goodwill that will soon ripen into affection. Sir Raphael went his way, Lady de Renzi and the young ladies went theirs; their thoughts were busy; their leisure was small; their days overcrowded with engagements: there seemed no space for Olivia anywhere to find a resting-place, no spot where she could strike a spark of kindness. More than once she had come back from visiting her future relations with ruffled nerves and in an agitated temper, and had expressed herself about them with an outspokenness which filled Mrs. Heriot's soul with the direst apprehensions. The case was one which baffled her powers of analysis.

She could not diagnose, she could not prescribe for it. Olivia's light-heartedness appeared to be deserting her at the very moment when joy, confidence, triumph, ought, as she judged, to be at their highest pitch. She had rallied Olivia sometimes on her melancholy moods, as accidents which naturally befall people who are excessively in love, the mere reaction of overwrought sentiment. Lovers are traditionally a moody, wayward race, who vex their own and each other's souls with groundless alarms, unjust suspicions, imaginary grievances. Comfort, tranquillity, happiness, come only with marriage. And what marriage could promise more happily, more auspiciously than Olivia's?

Once, coming suddenly into Olivia's room, Mrs. Heriot had found her in tears. There was no time for concealment, nor did Olivia attempt it. These exhibitions of waywardness were, to Mrs. Heriot, excessively pro-

voking. They were girlish folly, of which any rational being ought to be heartily ashamed. They deserved rough handling—they required it. How could the bride-elect of one of the richest and most brilliant young men in London have any conceivable excuse for crying? Such moods were best combated by a judicious firmness. ‘What is the matter now, Olivia?’ she asked in a tone that breathed anything rather than sympathy. ‘Are you ill, or have you had a lovers’ quarrel? What is it you are crying about? You will make yourself a perfect fright.’

Olivia speedily was mistress of herself. ‘Was I crying?’ she said. ‘Well, Isabella, perhaps it was because my new relations are so kind to me—that is, if they ever become my relations.’

‘If ever they become!’ cried Mrs. Heriot in consternation. ‘You do not mean to say, Olivia, that you are doubting?’

‘Just now,’ said Olivia, ‘I doubt every

thing but one, and that is that I dislike Lady de Renzi and her daughters. I am positive of that. I shall always dislike them; they are not likeable.'

'Not likeable?' asked her cousin. 'I like them well enough.'

'Possibly,' said Olivia; 'and so might I, if I was not doomed to become their relation.'

'Doomed!' cried Mrs. Heriot. 'What can you possibly mean?'

'I mean,' said Olivia, 'that it is a misfortune to belong to such people as Lady de Renzi. She is vulgar, worldly, overbearing. As soon as I am married she will begin to tyrannise over me. She dislikes me, and I return the compliment.'

'How can you talk like that, Olivia, even to me?' said Mrs. Heriot. 'Of course, if you have thoughts like that in your mind, Lady de Renzi will dislike you. Fortunately, you are marrying Claude, not his mother.'

‘Fortunately,’ said Olivia; ‘or perhaps unfortunately. Who can tell?’

‘What!’ cried her companion; ‘do you mean that you are doubting about Claude?’

‘I am doubting about everything,’ said Olivia. ‘I doubted when he proposed to me. I am as doubtful now as then—doubtful whether I ought to have accepted him—doubtful if I am the right wife for him—doubtful if he loves me as he ought, or I love him as I ought—doubtful if I can ever be all he will wish for in his wife—doubtful whether I can honestly go on. Isabella, I am miserable; have mercy on me, and help me. What am I to do?’

But there was no mercy to be seen in Mrs. Heriot’s cold gray eyes; rather a steady rigidness, a glance of scorn, provocation, resentment. She looked now with steady determination at Olivia; her lips were rigid, her face was like iron, her tones incisive. It was no moment, she was thinking, for

hesitation or reserve. The crisis was too acute.

‘Olivia,’ she said, ‘we had better understand each other. I will not be made a fool of ; nor, if I can help it, let you make a fool of yourself. You are behaving now like a fool. I will have no such folly here. There must be no backing out of your engagement, no nonsense about your future relations : you have not got to marry them, nor need you love them or like them, though I should advise you to be as civil to them as you can. But you *have* got to marry Claude de Renzi. You have known him for two years ; you have constantly met ; you know each other thoroughly ; you have never disguised your feelings about him ; you loved him a month ago well enough to accept him ; it is nonsense to suppose that you do not love him now. Love or no love, you must go on. I will have no jilting in my house, and no playing with the idea of it, as you are doing now.

You must be out of your senses to think of it. You know what your position is. I have done everything for you. Thanks to me, you are about to make a splendid match. To throw over such a marriage for a whim—a silly girlish caprice—would be the act of an idiot. You must be an idiot for it even to have occurred to you. There is not a girl in London who does not envy you your good luck. Remember, please, that if you break with Claude you break with me. I shall have nothing more to do with you. You will have to go back to Axborough and teach your cousins arithmetic.'

'I would sooner do that,' cried Olivia, flushing up and looking wild and rebellious, 'than marry a man whom I am not sure of loving. I will do it if needs be.'

'I shall be as good as my word,' said Mrs. Heriot; 'you may rely upon that. But I know you mean to be a good girl, and behave like a rational being. This evening

you are overwrought and excited. We are both excited. Do not let us talk about it any more till we are cooler. I have confidence in your good sense.'

The conciliatory close of Mrs. Heriot's harangue had been inspired by Olivia's appearance. She looked like a young rebel angel of a determined order. She had it in her to rebel, it was certain; she would do so unless handled judiciously. So Mrs. Heriot felt that she had been too peremptory, too plain-spoken.

'I wish that I could share your confidence,' said Olivia, 'or that I could feel confident about anything. I wish to do what is right, Isabella; I mean to do it, cost me what it may. Only please do not drive me.'

Mrs. Heriot began to understand that Olivia, if she was to go in the desired direction, required extremely gentle driving.

CHAPTER XXXII

IT RAINS DIAMONDS

‘Il y a bien peu de femmes qui n’aient entrevu le ciel a l’heure de leurs fiançailles, et ne donneraient une partie de leur vie pour l’entrevoir encore.’

THUS Olivia’s soul was beginning to drift apart in solitude, tempest-tossed on waves of doubt, carried this way and that by conflicting currents of emotion. On the one side the world was beaming upon her with siren smiles. The incense of homage floated rich and delicious around her. The world was at her feet. If she entered a drawing-room she knew that her presence at once became a force that was felt; men were continually asking to be introduced to her; women were continually inventing excuses

to become friends with her. She had a sense—a delightful thrilling sense—of success. Society found her delightful, crowned her with flowers, and led her from one triumph to another. In a few weeks she would be in possession of all in the way of splendour, pleasure, importance that wealth could give. Meanwhile her every whim was law. Claude was always on the look-out for some new way in which he might gratify her caprice. He loaded her with presents. Her jewelry had till now consisted of a few relics of her mother's scanty store—poor little shabby bits of finery which she had safeguarded in former days with a religious care. Now treasures poured in amain. Sir Raphael sent her a diamond necklace, which no female eye—not Olivia's certainly—could contemplate without emotion. Claude himself was continually bringing her some new costly offering, always in the best taste, *recherché*, beautiful, such as a lovely woman might well

love wherewith to decorate her loveliness. Rich relations and a wide circle of those who were friends of the De Renzis, or who wished to become so, kept up the golden deluge. Olivia was pleased with her new acquisitions. They were her own; she had never owned anything worth sixpence before. The sensation was novel and agreeable. Yet in the cup of mortal enjoyment there is always the *amari aliquid*. Olivia began to get *blasée* of splendid gifts. With their novelty they lost their charm. Claude condemned not a few of them, as in bad taste, or insufficient in splendour—a blunder or an impertinence on the donor's part. They gave Claude himself, it was obvious, not the slightest satisfaction, except in so far as they gratified Olivia. Such presents as Olivia in former years had received—few, meagre, and of a cheapness that it was now almost a joke to remember—had always meant love, friendship, or sentiment. Olivia felt now with some bitterness

that many of her new acquisitions meant nothing—nothing, that is, beyond the conventional compliment due from the donor to Sir Raphael de Renzi for business favours, or to his wife for a given number of dinners, balls, and other social favours.

‘Look at this amethyst cross,’ she said to Claude one morning; ‘is it not lovely? Who is Lady Everard? Why has she sent it to me, I wonder?’

‘Do you?’ De Renzi answered. ‘There is nothing to wonder at. It is gratitude in its purest form, a keen sense of favours to come. Her husband wants my father’s support in a railway which he is wanting to run through his side of the county. It is to go right through his estate, and will be worth, I daresay, £100,000 to him. That cross is worth perhaps £50—no!—there is a flaw in that amethyst—it is not worth £30. It is not a bad investment, is it, of Lady Everard? Let us hope it will pay.’

How to find satisfaction in presents so given? in base offerings to court the favour of a millionaire, to buy profitable influence—as much a part of speculative outlay as the cost of advertisements or the commission of an agent. When Olivia's home was broken up, some village children, whom she loved, had clubbed their halfpennies together and bought of a pedlar, who represented to them the fine arts and commerce of the outer world, a pincushion of hideous splendour, which they presented with much ceremony and soul-stirring emotion to the dear friend who was passing out of their horizon for ever. It could not, on the most generous calculation, have been worth a shilling; but Olivia had received it with tears, with a throbbing heart, with painful pleasure; she remembered it with a glow of affection. None of her splendid marriage offerings had ever stirred a single one of the emotions which lay, thick as the leaves in Vallombrosa, carpeting the

untrodden solitude of her existence. They lay there—but no gust of sentiment disturbed them. Her lover's presents were almost as bad as the rest. They were given with prosaic indifference; they lacked romance. They were less the outpouring of a generous soul than judicious investments for one who, by formal arrangements, was to become a member, a brilliant member, of the De Renzi family. Claude haggled over the price of his purchases, drove excellent bargains, and would not buy unless the price was such as satisfied him that he was getting his money's worth. A lover's gift, Olivia romantically deemed, ought not to be too carefully appraised by the giver.

Now again, Olivia had a present which touched her. Jack Heriot called one day at his uncle's and made an excuse to speak a word to her apart. 'Come and show me your presents, Olivia. I hear they are magnificent.'

‘Come,’ said Olivia, leading the way to a back drawing-room where these treasures were arranged, ‘but never mind the presents. I am tired to death of them. Sit down here and let us have a chat. How are they all at Huntsham? Why do you never come near me?’

‘Because I am too busy, and you are too gay, Olivia. Our lives have drifted apart. We can do each other no good.’

‘Indeed,’ said Olivia, ‘you could do me a great deal of good. I never needed my old friends so badly, or cared more for them. And you are my oldest friend, though sometimes I think you have forgotten it.’

‘I shall never forget it,’ cried Jack; ‘I never could. What have I that I care to remember but our happy Huntsham days? Golden days they were for me. No, Olivia, whatever else I am guilty of towards you it will not be forgetfulness. But I must present my offering — a little sketch of

Huntsham, my first performance as a landscape painter. Some day, when I have become famous, it will be invaluable ; meanwhile it will recall the days when we were boy and girl.'

'Those happy days!' said Olivia with a sigh. 'What a pity that we cannot live them over again! Thank you, Jack, for your present. It is the one I like best of all. But there is my cousin calling me ; I must go back to them.'

Jack went away with a full heart. Olivia had never looked more lovely — gentler, sweeter, more the ideal of his boyish worship. Had her eyes been swimming with tears when she smiled him her farewell? Jack scarcely knew, for his own eyes had been dim. He had been in a sort of dream. Those few moments had translated him to Paradise, only to be thrust out again all too soon on a cold, loveless world. They had been a revelation.

Olivia was the same as ever. He was the same. Nature intended them for each other. Had he been a fool or poltroon to let the accidents of fortune deprive him of his rights—to let another win her? It was too late, alas, for such self-questionings to serve any purpose but to enhance the misery of frustrated hopes and vain regrets. Jack was sure now, if never before, that Olivia was his only chance of happiness, and that his loss was irremediable.

Such a scene did not aid in reconciling Olivia to her lot, her present surroundings, her new relations, her destined life. The talk with Jack recalled to her with vividness some things which she was schooling herself to forget — some canons of taste which had now to be ignored, some standards of refinement of which many things and persons around her fell short. The more she saw of her new relations the less congenial did they seem, the less prospect

was there of any future affection. Olivia had heard nothing, at the time, of the family opposition to her engagement. But now the secret escaped. Claude, when she questioned him about it, was constrained to acknowledge that his father had not, at first, regarded the proposed alliance with satisfaction. 'There was nothing in that, surely,' he protested laughingly. 'Fathers always do—do they not?—object to a disinterested love-match like ours. I have no doubt that he still thinks us a couple of simpletons. That need not make us unhappy, Olivia. We are a happy pair of lovers, are we not?'

'Most happy,' said Olivia, whose bad spirits took immediate flight at the first note of affection; 'I am happy, at any rate—too happy to be disturbed by small troubles. All the same, I wish I did not find my relations, that are to be, quite so terribly alarming! Lady de Renzi and your

sisters make me feel shyer than I have ever felt before.'

'You shy!' cried De Renzi; 'but your shyness gives the finishing touch to your perfection; it is the crowning charm.'

Despite her good resolutions and Claude's encouragement, Olivia's intercourse with the De Renzis proved, as familiarity wore off the fine edge of politeness, increasingly disagreeable. Their behaviour was dry, off-hand, sometimes on the verge of rudeness. It chilled her to the very soul. Old campaigners, who have fought their way through the world and know its rough give-and-take, become accustomed to rudeness and indifferent to it. But to the novice—the sensitive, gentle, ardent nature longing for sympathy, for affection, for encouragement—unkindness is the death-blow to high spirits. Olivia, on the days when she went to lunch with the De Renzis, used to come back dreadfully depressed. They filled her with misgivings.

They emphasised the phase of Claude's character of which she had seen least, a phase of worldliness, scheming, pushing. In Lady de Renzi and her daughters it was undisguised. Did it exist in Claude? He was ambitious, of course, but ambitious in the right way, the way of noble minds—ambitious of greatness, of power; but did he also share the lower ambitions that swayed his family? Olivia's heart answered this question in a delightfully satisfactory manner. 'If he were thus ambitious—ambitious in a mean sense—would he ever have wished to marry me?' Comforting, reassuring, delightful reasoning. Claude himself made light of his relations' behaviour, and explained it with laughing apologies. 'My father,' he said, 'has been all his life coining money till he can hardly see over his gold piles. He would wish his son to follow in his wake, and begin with a lucrative marriage. I believe he thinks it is what

marriages were made for. As for my mother, she is like other good mothers, and I daresay had some nice little project—a golden one—for a favourite son. We must propitiate her.'

'Propitiate her!' cried Olivia, whose spirits had been sinking to zero as Claude proceeded with the family portraiture; 'I only wish I could. But how?'

'By succeeding, dear Olivia, as you will; by dazzling the parental vision with something better even than gold; by being, as you cannot help being, the most beautiful, the most brilliant, the gayest, sweetest, most enchanting young lady of your day. You can do it, Olivia; you shall do it. I can see you accomplishing it.'

'And suppose,' said Olivia, 'that I fail? I very likely shall.'

'Fail!' cried De Renzi; 'my wife fail! my beautiful Olivia—with all her charms, backed by her wits and her husband's—fail!

What a conception! No, Olivia, you will succeed; all men's hearts will be yours, to say nothing of your husband's:

“Not once nor twice in polished London's story
The path of Beauty's been the road to glory.”

You will play your part to perfection.'

'Stop, stop!' cried Olivia. 'I believe that it is the right thing for lovers to be extravagant. How much am I to believe of all this? It is too much, too much. If you love me, Claude, if you are sure that you love me, it is enough.'

'If I love you!' cried De Renzi, by this time roused to excitement. 'Don't you see that I am fanatically in love with you? Am I sure indeed!'

'Well,' said Olivia, 'promise one thing, Claude. If ever you cease to be sure, will you promise to tell me? If you should ever, in the months which are to pass before our marriage, feel a doubt whether I shall be all

to you that you wish your wife to be (such things happen to men, you know, sometimes), I bind you by a vow to tell me, so that I may make you free.'

'I vow,' cried De Renzi, 'that, if ever I cease to think you the most enchanting of women, I will dub myself fool, villain, and blockhead. But no, Olivia, I am yours for life and death ; you must never doubt it.'

'I will not doubt it ; I do not. I am yours, too, Claude, for life and death,' Olivia said, putting her hand in De Renzi's with a grave, tender gesture, and letting it stay there. 'Perhaps I am frightened at my own good fortune ; but I will be frightened no more.'

De Renzi's rhapsodies did not suffice to enable Olivia to regard her new relations with equanimity. She was to find no love, it was clear, among them. Her chance of being tolerated depended on her success. Olivia felt herself well qualified to succeed ;

but this use of success filled her soul with apprehension and melancholy. Had this family, of which she was about to become a member, really no hearts? Had they never known the touch of human love, the touch that makes the whole world kin? Did they know what it meant—what tenderness, sympathy, devotion meant? Sometimes in their society she had felt as if she were in pandemonium; everything was so bright, so hard, so cynical, so wanting in compassion, so unstirred by any tender or generous impulse. And it was among these people that she was for the future to find her home.

CHAPTER XXXIII

MR. COSMO'S PICNIC

‘Strange and piteous to think what a centre of wretchedness a delicate piece of human flesh might be, wrapped round with fine raiment, her ears pierced with gems, her head held loftily, her mouth all smiling patience, the poor soul within her sitting in sick distaste of all things.’

ONE of the occasions on which De Renzi wished and expected Olivia to shine was not long in arriving. Mr. Cosmo, despite his cynical conviction that life is not worth living, possessed several important contrivances for enhancing its material enjoyments. He had a villa on the Thames, where luxury as a fine art attained its choicest perfection, and a steam-launch, which was no unworthy pendant to the villa. Both were as near perfection as

Cosmo's taste and purse could make them ; and this, the most exacting connoisseurs admitted, was very near indeed. A youth spent in Italy had taught Cosmo the sort of abode in which a sultry day, which scorches the outside world, may be safely defied from amid shady recesses and cool arcades ; where fountains, plashing on the marble, offer a delicious freshness and lull the senses to a pleasant languor ; where everything breathes of indolence and invites to effortless enjoyment. To this agreeable residence it was Cosmo's custom, as the summer's heat came on and London air became oppressive, to invite successive parties of his friends to spend a Sunday with him in the country. For the occasion on which the Heriots and Olivia, and of course, Olivia's lover, were invited, it was arranged that the party should steam a few miles up the river to a lovely spot where they would find luncheon in the shade awaiting them. This *al fresco* lunch

was a tribute to the sultry weather. Those who knew Cosmo looked forward to it with interest, for his *chef* was renowned for brilliant effects and would be sure to contrive something worthy of an inspiring occasion ; and the occasion would be inspiring, for the Duke of Egeria was to be among the guests, and several of the most agreeable men and brilliant women in London had been invited to amuse the Duke of Egeria.

De Renzi, Olivia saw, was extremely gratified at the invitation. The party, Mr. Cosmo wrote kindly, was in honour of Olivia. Mrs. Heriot, too, was delighted. Olivia found it difficult to share their enthusiasm. ‘I think I dislike Sunday expeditions,’ she said ; ‘they make Sunday the hardest day’s work of the week, and one is in sore need of a rest ; and, besides, I am a Puritan, a Methodist. I am fond of an old-fashioned Puritan Sunday.’

‘I hope,’ said De Renzi, on whose good

nature Olivia's announcements of this sort always had rather an irritating effect, 'that you will be able to leave the Puritan at home on this occasion, as Puritanism is not exactly what is in request at Cosmo's entertainments. People go into the country, do they not, because London Sundays are so detestably Puritanic? This party, moreover, Olivia, is intended in your honour. It is a compliment. Cosmo's parties are great events. All the smartest people in London are asked in the course of the summer. Moreover, I particularly want you to be civil to him.'

'Do you?' said Olivia. 'I will do my best; but I do not *feel* particularly civil to him; and he is too civil to me to be quite agreeable. However, I will be as polite as I can. All the same, Claude, I wish that we could get off. I feel as if I would give anything for a quiet day, a quiet evening. When was the last we had, Isabella? I believe I am very tired.'

‘What nonsense!’ cried Mrs. Heriot. ‘It will be the best way of resting. You cannot possibly get off, and why should you?’

‘Get off!’ exclaimed De Renzi with a clear decisiveness which Olivia began now to observe in him whenever his will was thwarted; ‘when I tell you that it is the party of all others that I want you to go to, and that I have a special reason for being glad that you are invited. What an idea!’

Olivia said nothing. She resigned herself to her fate. She had, in fact, besides her fatigue, a special reason for wishing not to go, which she did not choose to produce in public. The day in question was a sad one to her, the date of her mother’s death. She and her father had always kept it with a pious observance. Little had been said or done, but each had known what was passing in the other’s mind. They had kept it together for the last time, as it had proved, the summer before his death. The next time Olivia had

been among strangers at the Pines and had observed it in privacy. Now it seemed a sort of pious duty to father as well as mother to keep it. Olivia longed to do so. She longed to be quiet, to be alone, to commune in spirit with the loved ones whom she had lost, to give herself to serious thoughts, which all around her ignored, which all things tended to obliterate in herself. There seemed no one to whom she dared to confide her wish. It would have been folly, profanation, to drag such a feeling out for Isabella's cold unfeeling eye to stare at. It was Olivia's secret, her own private sentiment. It was sacred to her. She dreaded profaning it. Afterwards, when they were alone together, and De Renzi seemed in a congenial mood, she told him. Alas! she was grievously disappointed at the reception that her confidence encountered. De Renzi seemed annoyed at a further attempt to controvert his wish. He evidently could not understand

her feeling. He could not conceal that the excuse seemed to him an absurd one. He was entirely unsympathetic. Olivia, greatly disconcerted, felt only a passionate desire to withdraw the topic from discussion. She would go anywhere, she would submit to anything rather than have the subject discussed by those who could not understand it. 'Say no more, Claude,' she said. 'I will go. I see you wish it. I daresay that I shall enjoy it. The truth is, that I have a prejudice against Mr. Cosmo. I cannot bear his eyes.'

'A woman's reason!' cried De Renzi, mollified by Olivia's acquiescence. 'What do his eyes signify to us? They are not the most ingenuous in the world, I admit; nor is candour Cosmo's forte. None the less, his parties are excellent. Everybody goes to them, or would like to go.'

'What a dreadful person Everybody is,' said Olivia with a sigh, 'and what a tyrant about tastes—and what odd tastes they some-

times are! Why is Everybody always to be dictating to us? For my part, I retain my opinion of Mr. Cosmo's eyes; they are detestable.'

'Well,' said De Renzi with some peremptoriness of tone, 'you have decided to go to his party, and I have given in about his eyes, so we have no points of difference. I hope you will be gracious to him.'

Mr. Cosmo was a power in the City: he controlled the policy of the great Inter-oceanic Trust, and the influence of the Inter-oceanic Trust was, just now, of importance to the De Renzis. They had a big transaction on hand, a Bolivian loan, involving vast interests to all concerned. There were rivals in the field. Opinions were divided. To lose an ally at such a moment would be disastrous. Cosmo had not yet been gained; he might be lost. To offend him would be calamitous. The essential thing was to conciliate him, and Olivia's graces were a powerful means of

conciliation. Nor was he, to all appearance, difficult to conciliate. He was a man of foibles, and his pet foible was to be smiled upon by the reigning beauties of the day. No one in certain circles, it was said, had established her position as a woman of fashion till she had been fêted by Cosmo. For men he cared little, and took but little trouble to be polite to them.

‘Why are you not friends with Cosmo?’ some one had asked of Stonehouse, à propos of this very party.

‘Because,’ said that gentleman with laconic severity, ‘I do not happen to be young, pretty, and somebody else’s wife; and, moreover, because Cosmo always reminds me of that wise dictum of somebody’s, that human nature is a damned rascal.’

‘What do you think of him yourself?’ Olivia had asked De Renzi.

‘What do I think of him?’ her lover answered in the airy manner which, Olivia

knew, meant that the subject did not require further discussion; 'I think he is what he looks—estimable, benevolent, a cultured gentleman, an eminent Christian, a perfect host. In other words, Sir Raphael de Renzi and Company need his assistance for their Bolivian loan.'

'And it is for that,' cried Olivia, 'that you wish me to be gracious to him, and to endure his politeness, or, as I regard it, his impertinence? What a use to make of one!'

'Is not that a rather rough way of putting it?' pleaded De Renzi. 'Come, Olivia, come down from your sublimities and talk like a reasonable woman. We business people have our concerns to manage, like the rest of mankind. They depend on negotiation, and negotiations depend on good humour, and no one can manufacture good humour like a charming woman. It is charming woman's celestial function in a world of blundering

men. How would anything get on without her and her benign intervention? Into what pie does she not dip her pretty finger-tips? Women move the world, they smooth irritation, they allay suspicion, they conciliate goodwill, they supply a motive to men who would otherwise be motiveless; they——'

'They float Bolivian loans!' said Olivia; 'I see. I understand it all now. We are the light artillery in the battle of life; we rush in where men are afraid to tread. We effect what men are too clumsy to manage; we are the chimney-sweeps whom cruel masters send up into the soot in order not to have to go themselves. What a grand idea of woman's position in the world!'

'Grand or not,' said De Renzi with some irritation, for Olivia's satirical and contemptuous moods seemed to him disagreeably easy to arouse, 'it is the truth. They all do it, and the sanctimonious ones the worst. Show me the woman, who has the power to influence

mankind, who does not turn her powers to good account.'

'In short,' said Olivia, 'I am to bury my prejudices against Mr. Cosmo full forty fathoms deep and behave to him like an angel. Those are my orders.'

De Renzi was exceedingly provoked, but it would not do, he felt clearly, to show provocation. 'You are making too much of it altogether,' he said. 'A man, whom everybody likes and to whom everybody goes, asks you among the rest. He is powerful, and we want his power on my father's side, and not against him. What is there in our accepting his hospitality? Are we to insult him because we don't consider his manner perfect, and have a lurking suspicion that he is not a paragon of virtue? How many men are?'

'I know one man who is,' said Olivia; 'one is enough for me. Seriously, Claude, I will do exactly what you wish. I will go to the picnic. I will go anywhere you tell me.'

I trust myself to you. Wherever I go, I shall feel safe so long as you are at hand to protect me.'

'You will need no protection,' said De Renzi. 'Every one acknowledges that, whatever his other shortcomings, Cosmo is a perfect host.'

'Is he?' said Olivia. 'I will take your word for it, Claude. We will discuss him no more.'

De Renzi had by this time begun to perceive that Olivia had much to learn, that she was not particularly docile, and was likely to give a great deal of trouble before her education was complete. He had an uncomfortable consciousness that he had to do with a courageous spirit, to whom fear was unknown, and whose submission would be difficult to achieve. It would be difficult to dominate such a woman. All the more resolutely did he determine on domination.

Mrs. Heriot, too, considered that Olivia

stood in need of a little good advice. She took an early opportunity of giving her a lecture on the behaviour of a properly conducted *fiancée*.

‘Do you know,’ she said, ‘that you are an alarmingly independent young lady, and too fastidious for a fallen world? You are endangering your own happiness. Claude is devoted to you, and will stand a great deal; but nothing shocks a man so much as self-will.’

‘Self-will!’ cried Olivia; ‘I thought I was submissiveness itself. I did all that Claude asked me.’

‘Yes,’ said the other, ‘but after a sort of pitched battle. Put fights of that kind off, let me advise you, Olivia, till after your marriage, and do not turn up your nose at parties which your future lord and master wishes you to grace. For my part, I cannot conceive why you should not like Mr. Cosmo.’

‘Like him!’ cried Olivia; ‘like eyes of

blue steel, cold, cruel, hard! the smile of Judas, the sneer of Mephistopheles. No, Isabella, I do not like him, nor ever shall. He frightens, he shocks me. I breathe more comfortably when he is away. I shall feel better when this horrid party is over. I owe Sir Raphael de Renzi a grudge that I am obliged to go to it.'

Olivia felt herself, her better self, her sentiment, her tenderness, her aspirations, being gradually asphyxiated. In the Finnish epic there is a story of a divine artificer who fashions for some amorous deity a bride of gold and silver. The amorous deity is pleased at first with the splendour of his new possession; but joy gives way to horror when he discovers that, in spite of fur and fire, whenever he touches her she freezes him. So Olivia, amid the glamour of wealth and much external finery that dazzled her, began to feel a mortal chill. Something in her lover was turning her to ice. Supposing

that, like the Finnish bride, he was composed of precious metals, not of warm and living flesh and blood! Olivia was running the round of pleasure : life was one long banquet ; but dissatisfaction, weariness of heart, *ennui* attended at the profuse repast. She lived in a crowd, but, ah, how solitary may the soul become, crowded and hustled by uncongenial surroundings! ' Little do men perceive,' says Bacon, ' what solitude is, how far it extendeth. For a crowd is not company, and faces are but a gallery of pictures, and talk but a tinkling cymbal, where there is no love.' Of this sort of cruel, loveless solitude Olivia's gentle soul was now becoming painfully aware.

CHAPTER XXXIV

A SUNDAY ON THE THAMES

‘A bolt is shot back somewhere in our breast,
And a lost pulse of feeling stirs again ;
The eyes sink inward and the heart lies plain,
And what we mean we say, and what we would we
 know ;
A man becomes aware of his life’s flow,
And hears its winding murmur ; and he sees
The meadows where it glides, the sun, the breeze ;
 And then he thinks he knows
 The hills where his hope rose
 And the sea where it goes.’

THE morning was sultry, and Mr. Cosmo’s guests, as the launch went speeding amid meadow and woodland, congratulated themselves heartily on their escape from the dust and glare of London to the shade and the cool breezes that were ruffling the Thames beneath the Clifden woods. A midsummer

sky blazed overhead, but cloudlets here and there spoke of disturbances in the upper regions ; and there was a heaviness in the atmosphere which seemed as if exhausted nature were panting for the refreshment of a storm. The storm, however, would not, the weatherwise predicted, be till to-morrow ; and meanwhile the languor of the outer world seemed to suggest complete self-surrender to the most indolent possible form of enjoyment. Lounging on the sofas of Cosmo's launch, with the prospect of further lounging in the delicious shade of the lime trees, beneath which the banquet of the afternoon was awaiting them, was just the sort of existence for which the party felt disposed. Everything around them spoke of pleasurable ease. The river was gay with holiday-makers, bent, like themselves, on an otiose Sunday. They passed group after group, whose merry sounds, holiday costumes, and reposeful attitudes told a pleasant tale of

ease and mirth. No one, surely, has really seen England, or gauged the capacity of Englishmen for play as well as work, who has not watched the gay array of holiday-makers who crowd the pleasant reaches of the Thames on a fine summer day. On either side the country lay smiling—a dream of rest. The hay fields, still new from the scythe, gleamed bright and clean; great breadths of corn were yellowing for the harvest. The villages peeped out amid the woodlands, the church bells were sounding pleasantly across the meadows. The party on the launch grew gay. The Duke of Egeria had arrived in high spirits, evidently resolved to enjoy himself. Every surrounding circumstance seemed to abet him in that laudable resolution. The ladies, scattered in picturesque groups about the sofas and easy-chairs with which the launch abounded, formed a charming centre to the loveliness of surrounding nature.

Mrs. Backhouse, not too broken-hearted to be exquisitely dressed, shone serenely in a costume the artless simplicity of which all felt to be consummate art. Beside her sat Florian, whose recent volume of sonnets proclaimed the apostle of æstheticism. He was now, with the privileged outspokenness of friendship, complimenting Mrs. Backhouse on the poetry of her dress. 'It is a pastoral symphony,' he said; 'a medley of exquisite tints. It breathes of the daffodils, the buttercups, and the daisies.'

'We will go and gather some this afternoon,' Mrs. Backhouse said, raising her lovely azure eyes to reward Florian's politeness. 'I shall expect an impromptu sonnet under the lime trees.'

There were other ladies, however, whose dresses had been designed with other ideas than that of simplicity. Miss Bond, the last imported American heiress, was as impressive in daring effects as M. Worth could make

her. She was now entertaining the duke with an exhibition of naïve impertinence, which English society had been for several weeks past encouraging her to mistake for wit. The duke showed no intention of un-deceiving her. Mrs. Calverby, a brilliant daughter of the Manchester plutocracy and one of Cosmo's most recent conquests, rivalled the American beauty in daring of toilette and originality of talk. There was little likelihood of conversation running short ; but, to guard against the possibility, M. Duc, the famous Sociétaire of the Comédie Française, was to give an impromptu ; and a young gentleman, known to his friends as Dodo—a spoilt darling of the Household Brigade, and one of Mrs. Backhouse's most favoured devotees—had brought his banjo, and promised to enliven the afternoon with a comic performance. The feminine ranks were further reinforced by Mrs. Mountjoy, a professional beauty, and

Mrs. Araby, a certificated wit. All seemed perfectly familiar with each other, and all completely at their ease—all, that is, except Olivia, who was feeling, each moment, more exquisitely uncomfortable. Mrs. Araby had scanned her through her eyeglass as she came on board, and had turned to ask something of the gentleman beside her; then she had said something in low tones which had produced a laugh. Miss Bond made no secret of her satisfaction in being introduced to Olivia, as one of the sights of London. ‘I have so often heard about you,’ she said good-naturedly, ‘and your gay deceiver. Now, happily for womankind, he will deceive no more!’ Then there was another laugh, and everybody seemed to be amused. De Renzi did not share the amusement. He stood frowning, and biting his moustache, as was his custom when annoyed. Olivia began to wish herself anywhere but where she was. What was there to be amused at

in a vulgar American's familiarity? There is no more effectual estrangement than a difference of taste in jokes. Olivia felt this estrangement; her spirits began to sink. In vain De Renzi brought up one gentleman after another to be introduced to her; in vain Cosmo came and devoted himself to being agreeable; in vain Mrs. Heriot took her to sit by Mrs. Araby, 'the most amusing woman in London, you know;' in vain Dodo tried all his powers of fascination to win her to a congenial mood; in vain was it that Florian told a series of admirable stories, which sent his audience into paroxysms of hilarity; vain were the witticisms, professional and amateur, that flashed around; vain were Olivia's own endeavours to be amused, to be as gay as her companions, to join in the talk that was flowing, so brisk and bright, on all hands around her. Her soul was growing cold within her. Struggle against it as she would, shyness

such as she had never before experienced, beset her, benumbing every faculty, paralysing every effort at cheerfulness. There was something in these people, in their style, their behaviour, their talk, their freemasonry, which made Olivia feel herself in a world of strangers, of enemies. She was not neglected, indeed ; but how grateful she would have felt for a little kindly neglect, for assured protection from Mrs. Araby's cynical smile, Cosmo's eye, Miss Bond's impertinent tongue ! She moved away and sought such refuge as was to be found in the narrow limits of the launch beside Mrs. Pygmalion. Mrs. Araby presently formed a little group around her of people with whom she could feel sure of amusing herself. Olivia was out of the talk, but fragments of the conversation fell, now and then, on her ear and obliged her to listen.

‘I have brought a book,’ Mrs. Araby said, showing a little volume to Mr. Pygmalion.

‘I always do on these occasions. You never know what may happen. If we are shipwrecked on a desert island, and food and conversation fail, I sit secure. I am provided against the worst. Stevenson is always delightful.’

‘Delightful!’ cried Pygmalion, who had been glancing at the book’s contents; ‘here, for instance, are some delightful things about marriage! I must read you them. He describes it as a terrible renunciation!’

‘Renunciation!’ cried Mrs. Araby. ‘Mr. de Renzi, this is interesting to you. Pray go on, Mr. Pygmalion.’

‘“A field of battle, not a bed of roses,”’ continued Pygmalion, picking out the phrases for public edification. ‘“A married man must roam no longer. Once married, there are no more by-path meadows where you may innocently linger; but the road lies long, and straight, and dusty to the grave. . . . You may think you had a conscience and

believed in God ; but what is a conscience to a wife ? To marry is to domesticate the recording angel. Once you are married there is nothing left for you, not even suicide, but to be good.”’

‘What a conception of a wife !’ cried Mrs. Araby ; ‘a domesticated recording angel ! the last sort of person one would wish to have about the premises !’

‘Horrible !’ cried Pygmalion. ‘I thought that the great point about a wife was, that there should be one person, at any rate, who is firmly convinced that there is nothing to record, or who, if there is, will drop a tear upon the place for the purpose of effacement.’

‘That is what nature intends,’ said the duke ; ‘men must work, except a few of us whose doom it is to play, and women must weep. Poor women !’

‘Of course,’ cried Florian ; ‘tears are her weapon, her grand resource. Even Napoleon, with a chaos of crushed empires at his im-

perial foot, admitted that he was no match for Josephine when she began to whimper. A tear is unanswerable.'

'The only answer, I suppose,' said Pygmalion, 'is to kiss it away.'

'In other words,' said Mrs. Araby, 'unconditional surrender.'

'And all done by a gland,' said Florian. 'So like Nature's grand simplicity—the entire male creation subjugated by a single pearly drop, which the female eye produces at its own sweet will.'

'Yes,' said Pygmalion, 'you know De Renzi's classic lines—

“When lovely woman finds 'tis folly
To hope that husbands will obey,
What charm will cure her melancholy,
What art restore her threatened sway?

“The art her empire to recover,
To quell the would-be rebel's eye;
To tame a disobedient lover,
Or crush a husband—is to cry!”’

‘And pray,’ said Mrs. Araby, turning to De Renzi, ‘how did you learn that? by experience, I suppose.’

There was a general laugh; some eyes were turned on Mrs. Backhouse, some on De Renzi. Olivia happened to look up in the direction of Mrs. Backhouse, and witnessed an unusual spectacle. That lady was accomplishing a most pronounced blush—deep, prolonged, unmistakable. She looked as uncomfortable as Olivia felt.

‘Spare him,’ said Florian; ‘he is about to domesticate his recording angel. There is nothing left to him, not even suicide, but to be good.’

‘Well,’ said Mrs. Araby, ‘it is never too late to mend; and nowadays almost anything can be mended, however small the little bits.’

De Renzi was looking black as thunder. ‘Mrs. Araby’s acid drops will help the process,’ he said; ‘her dark innuendoes and her bright example!’

‘He has *me* on his conscience,’ said Miss Bond; ‘the victim of systematic neglect. My heart is broken. I shall weep a small Niagara when I get home to-night!’

‘Woman’s tears!’ said Mrs. Araby; ‘why is it that marriage should involve so many of them?’

‘Because,’ said the duke, ‘the domesticated angel is apt to be a little too domestic.’

‘And naturally,’ put in Florian, ‘a little too angelic.’

‘Or,’ said Cosmo, ‘because, as some one has observed, there is all the difference between being in love with a woman and being harnessed to her—bit, blinkers, bearing rein, and the coachman’s whip if you begin to fidget! It is slavery, and a man hates his slave-driver. There must, I suppose, be husbands and wives; but it is inevitable that they should be mutually disagreeable. The worst thing to do with a charming woman is to marry her.’

‘You remember,’ said M. Duc, ‘the philosophy of a countryman of mine — “Si j’aimais une femme je la marierais peut-être, mais pas avec moi.”’

‘Marriage is a mistake, no doubt,’ said Mrs. Araby; ‘the great thing is to retrieve it judiciously. To quote another of your countrymen, M. Duc — “Ce ne sont pas toujours nos fautes qui nous perdent; c’est la manière de se conduire après les avoir faites.”’

‘But some men actually like it,’ said Cosmo. ‘Rousseau, you remember, says that he lived as happily with his Theresa — mean, greedy, jealous, and dull — as though she were a paragon of beauty and wit.’

‘But Rousseau,’ said Mrs. Araby, ‘was a genius. Moreover, he did his own recording angel’s business for himself.’

‘Yes,’ said Cosmo, ‘and some women like it, or behave as if they did, which encourages the rest, happily for the world. Marriage keeps them busy——’

‘And keeps them smart,’ said Florian. ‘Their lovely dresses are a compliment to us. Your earnest woman, who scorns mankind and lives for a purpose, is apt to neglect woman’s first great purpose—her toilette.’

‘I don’t see that at all,’ said Mrs. Backhouse; ‘the better I am dressed the better I feel, and the more in earnest. I always put on something pretty when I visit my hospital.’

‘Well,’ said the duke, ‘every woman should have an object.’

‘But no woman should *be* one,’ said Cosmo. ‘See, here is our landing-place.’

CHAPTER XXXV

A BLACK CLOUD WITH A SILVER LINING

‘As angels in some brighter dreams
Call to the soul when man doth sleep,
So some strange thoughts transcend our wonted themes
And into glory peep.’

THE party was soon on shore. A gentle slope of turf, stretching far on either side, formed a natural fringe to the woodland, which crept down toward the river bank. Some skilful hand had thinned the forest to the extent best calculated to reveal its charms. Here a noble stem stood out and met the eye in bold outline and relief; here a mass of creepers, tossed in romantic confusion from branch to branch, hid everything but their own fantastic exuberance; here well-shaded

avenues, cut into the wood, cool with overhanging foliage and grassy path, hinted of pleasant depths of gloom beyond the reach of the blazing, scorching world outside. Every one hurried to the shade.

‘Here!’ cried Mrs. Backhouse, who had no intention of letting Florian off his engagement as her cavalier; ‘here we shall find the daffodils and the daisies. I should like to wander all day in these delicious glades.’

‘Idyllic!’ cried Florian, ‘with an interval, however, for refreshments.’

‘Well,’ said Cosmo, ‘you can have a forest stroll now, if you prefer it to driving. The carriages must go round; but if you are not afraid of a mile in the shade, we will make a short-cut through the woodland to our lunch. The trees are worth looking at.’

‘I vote for walking!’ cried Mrs. Araby, and everybody followed her example.

‘Come, Mrs. Calverby,’ said Cosmo, ‘let us lead the way.’

‘Who, pray,’ asked the duke of Florian as they fell enough behind to be out of hearing, ‘is Mrs. Calverby? I have seen her several times of late. A showy woman, finely dressed, and with fine diamonds.’

‘The wife of some Stock Exchange potentate,’ said Pygmalion, ‘who, no doubt, gives her as many fine dresses and diamonds as she wants.’

‘The City woman,’ said Florian, ‘or, rather, the West End woman with a City husband,

“bears

The cost of princes on unworthy shoulders.”’

‘Hardly on her shoulders,’ said Pygmalion; ‘the tide of Mrs. Calverby’s extravagance does not swell quite as high as that. But, bare as they generally are, her shoulders are worthy of adoration. I must have them for my Nausicaa.’

‘Why is it,’ said the duke, ‘that some women cultivate propriety by trying to look as improper as they can?’

‘As if,’ said Florian, ‘they imagined “meretricious” to be the feminine of “meritorious”—which, for aught I know, it may be. But for my part I dislike glitter and gilt.’

‘Spelling guilt with a *u* or without it?’ asked Pygmalion.

‘We must ask Cosmo how to spell it,’ said the duke. ‘He knows everything.’

The path had opened and formed a sloping stretch of sward, in the midst of which, on a little eminence, stood a group of noble limes. Glimpses of the river peeped here and there through the wood. The lime trees threw a wide stretch of shade around them. A hum of bees in the upper branches filled the air with a slumbrous murmur. A delicious breeze, rich with sylvan scents, was blowing across the stream. Cosmo’s banquet, spread beneath the trees, glistened—a mass of rich colour—amid the soft surrounding tints.

‘You must all come to the top of the hill,’

said Cosmo, 'and get the view of the river and the most picturesque little church you ever saw. It is a tiny affair, but as old as the hills—as old, at any rate, as the Heptarchy.'

'The Heptarchy!' cried Miss Bond, awed into momentary decorum by the idea of such antiquity; 'and do you mean that none of you people have ever made a pilgrimage to it before?'

The scene was indeed romantic enough to fire a less ready enthusiasm than Miss Bond's. At the foot of the hill, but a few yards away, closely neighboured by overhanging trees and half buried in its own ivy, stood a little country church. A few half-obliterated grave-stones and a couple of yews, whose wide-spreading gnarled branches bespoke the flight of centuries, gave the scene its completing touches of quiet, melancholy rest. There were but few signs of modern use; though a rough road and one or two converging paths

from different quarters of the wood showed how a congregation, or rather such modest attempt at one as the narrow limits of the building allowed, might assemble. Few evidently now frequented it. A village, so tradition said, for which it had been built, had disappeared before a Norman monarch's sporting requirements in the way of undisturbed deer-coverts. Religious scruples had saved the church; it served now, probably, for an occasional service to some outlying hamlet; but the deserted look and untrodden paths showed that few were the worshippers who sought this unpretentious shrine. Some children stood in the porch, however, and it was obvious that some use of it was being made to-day.

‘The Heptarchy!’ exclaimed Miss Bond reverentially, as she stood and gazed; ‘I adore old things of every sort, especially churches. I must go down and indulge in some romance.’

‘We will all go afterwards,’ said Cosmo, ‘and be as romantic as you please. At present the claims of the practical, in the shape of lunch, are not to be denied. See, there is Franz sending to tell us that it is ready.’

This small diversion had given M. Franz the necessary time to put the finishing touches to several delicacies whose perfection would have been endangered by an instant’s delay. Everything was now complete, and the party soon disposed itself around a banquet which even its critical author, as he stood complacently watching its consumption from a distance, admitted to be worthy of his master, the occasion, and himself.

The champagne began to flow. The guests, with appetites quickened by the fatigues of the morning, busied themselves with courageous essays into the unimagined refinements of M. Franz’s *menu*. The good cheer told its tale in a general rise of spirits.

The duke was happy, and made M. Franz happy by demanding a second help of a new pudding, expressly devised in his honour for the occasion, and christened Egeria. The stream of conversation ran quick, strong, and boisterous. Mrs. Araby's venom became profuse, Miss Bond's fun uproarious.

The attractions of the repast diverted attention from the disagreeable fact that the clouds were gathering thickly overhead. The gloom now suddenly increased, and, before luncheon was over, sundry ominous growls and rumbles announced that the fair promise of the morning was not to be fulfilled. The storm, after all, was going to be to-day. It grew darker and darker. Already a drop had fallen on Mrs. Backhouse's dress.

'*Actum est!*' cried Florian; 'the most beautiful toilette in Europe will be ruined!'

What was to be done? The launch had not yet arrived; the carriages had been sent off to a village, a mile away, till after lunch.

Nobody had paid a cloudless morning the bad compliment of bringing an umbrella.

‘Fortunately,’ cried Cosmo, ‘we can, like other destitutes, take refuge in the church! We shall be an interesting addition to the congregation! Mrs. Araby, let us fly! None of you would forgive me if I betrayed you to a drenching, and I should never forgive myself.’

A vivid flash, which gave the disagreeable impression of lightning being ubiquitous, and a crashing peal of thunder close overhead, put an end to hesitation. The rain began to fall. There was a stampede for the church. The doors, happily, were open. Service was in course of performance. In another instant the whole party were safely established beneath a welcome roof. The building was small, shabby to the last degree, and tenanted only by scanty groups—a little row of children, a few old women and labourers. Olivia entered the first pew which offered,

and found herself alone in one of those high-walled enclosures, which the exclusivism of our grandfathers considered the fittest for purposes of public prayer. The building must have been dark at all times, shut in on every side by huge, over-towering trees, the narrow windows curtailed still further by encroaching ivy. But from without, just now, but little light was to be had. It was dark, and grew darker every moment. The humble ceremony progressed despite the crash of thunder and the pelting rain outside. The school children, clustered round the altar, assisted in the modest rite. The silence, the safety, the solitude, struck upon Olivia's senses with a sudden feeling of exquisite relief. The familiar words fell upon her ear like voices from a vanished world. A sense of peace, of rest, came over her. For a while she was safe. The rain, happily, showed no symptom of abating. The service would last another half-hour at the least. An

interval of quiet was assured—a respite, however short-lived, from the disagreeable surroundings of the rest of the day. Priest and people knelt to pray; Olivia followed their example. To pray? Was prayer, then, still an employment for reasonable beings? Was the side of things to which prayer belonged, with which religion had to do, still a reality? Is there still a world where the unseen, the invisible, the intangible, the aspirations of pious souls seeking for good, struggling through imperfection and failure towards its attainment, the patient fortitude of the unhappy, the penitent's self-searchings, the martyr's enthusiasm, are actual living forces, not the mere fictions of half-crazed brains, the joke of cynics, the contempt of philosophers? Has man a soul and a future, a duty to God, to his fellow-man, to himself? Is conscience the voice of God speaking within the soul, not a phrase for the scruples of the timorous, the hesitation

of the cowardly? Is life an awful glimpse of eternity, of vast eternities, stretching far away behind and before, a moment's revelation of unknowable, impenetrable mysteries, not the fortuitous concourse of a few atoms into a fleeting phantom, for which 'I know not and I care not' is the appropriate creed, and 'Let us eat and drink, for to-morrow we die' the only rational philosophy? Is religion a reality, the only reality, amid the phantasms of existence, or the last flicker of expiring superstitions at which civilised mankind can only smile? And, if a reality, what were the people among whom Olivia's lot was now cast? What was he to whose care she was about to commit herself, body and soul, with whom she was to face the actualities of the present, the possibilities of the future? What were her present companions? Was there anything which could awe them to a seriousness, or melt them to a tender mood? Was there anything at which they would

not sneer?—anything but the material in which they believed?—anything beyond the pleasures of sense for which they cared?

The service went on, prayer and chant and hymn. How familiar those sounds, how dear! They recalled the Sunday afternoons at her father's church. Those afternoons! How far they seemed to have vanished into the limbo of the past! Yet they, at least, were real. This had been the real part of Olivia's life. She had lived a phantasmal, an unreal existence ever since. Those times came back upon her now, so vivid, so living, that they crowded out the present: some summer evenings when she had walked with her father across the fields, and he had been in an especially charming mood. Those evenings had seemed delightful then, but now they gleamed with the very light of Paradise. He sat by her once again. He held her hand. He was lying on his sofa while she sang to him. He was reciting some well-

loved passage. He was reading to her from some favourite book. She was singing the songs he loved to hear. Olivia bent her head ; the tears began to flow. What a life had this been, and what a companion ! How peaceful, solemn, pure ; how cheered by a noble philosophy, how stirred by noble aspirations and noble hopes ! Beside it, how like a horrid nightmare seemed the life of which she was now tasting, the people with whom she now consorted. These men—cynical, cold, incredulous of good, of generous motive, of loyal act, who sneered at virtue as a pretence, at religion as a dream of savages, who threw off every trammel of creed or custom. Were they the better, the nobler, for their so-called emancipation, for their enlightened selfishness, their scorn of all that mankind has held sacred, their scoffing contempt for all that which awes the mind, that checks the hand of passion, that interferes with animal pleasure ? These women

—Mrs. Araby, with her poisoned jokes, her ruthless sarcasms, her tongue of evil, her eye of malice; Miss Bond, with her coarse effrontery; Isabella, with her mean contrivances and ignoble aims; the duke, with his cynical selfishness; Cosmo, with wicked glittering eyes. Olivia thought of Lady Heriot—serene, gentle, refined, courageous, but with how different a courage from the senseless indifference of the mundane throng around her. How calm, how resigned, how hopeful, how truly great! ‘Death stands above me,’ she had once said to Olivia in a confidential moment—

“Death stands above me, whispering low
 I know not what into my ear;
 Of his strange language all I know
 Is there is not a word of fear.”

How did her present companions look at death but as one degrading incident of an existence made up of degradations! What would Lady Heriot have thought of these

people? What would she have thought of Olivia's predicament?

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A sudden light shone in upon her and lit up her soul with the radiance of hope. It had all the suddenness of an inspiration. From whence did it come and how? Her fate was not irretrievably fixed. There was still a door of escape; salvation might be achieved. Of late the cup of life had been full of distasteful ingredients. She had never known true happiness, contentment, peace of soul, since her engagement. She had entered on it, had been hurried into it, betrayed into it, rashly, ignorantly. It was open to her still to draw back, if fuller knowledge, riper experience warned her from a disastrous self-surrender. She had discovered many things about herself, many about her lover, since that promise had been given. They had altered her view; they had filled her with fear, distrust, sometimes actual dislike. She

might yet be free. Her heart leapt up in exultation at the thought. 'Leave this land of false enchantment,' an inward monitor seemed to cry; 'turn your back on these false joys, these dangerous companions, these unreal pleasures. Seek happiness elsewhere, or forego the search. You can do this, you dare to do it, you must. You will need courage, strength, heroism. Be courageous, heroic.' The thought spread over Olivia's mind like some welcome stream flowing on to the parched soil, carrying with it refreshment, renovation, life. Hope, joy, radiance ineffable broke in upon her soul. Deliverance was still achievable. Her fate was still in her own hands.

Olivia went out of church inspired with a new idea. Ruin—if indeed ruin was now before her—was still to be escaped. She resolved, cost what it might, to escape it. She was a hopeful, happy woman, with a brave resolve.

The storm was over. Some carriages had arrived to convey the party to the launch, where welcome tea was awaiting them. They became very merry as they steamed down the river to Cosmo's villa. The *contretemps* of the afternoon had, to some extent, marred the perfection of the day's arrangements, but it reacted on the gentlemen's spirits. Nothing is so provocative of mirth as a small misfortune, well got through—a crisis that proves not too critical for good humour to surmount. The ladies' dresses were saved, so that the misfortune had been a very small one. Cosmo's luncheon had served its purpose before the downpour reduced the *débris* to undistinguishable ruins. M. Franz alone, who got his feet wet and caught a violent cold, breathed a deeper vow than ever of detestation of the English climate, and contempt for the English habit of feeding, like animals, in the open air. The English guests appeared, however, if one might judge from

their hilarity, to consider that all things had gone as they ought. Florian threw off the poet and asked several conundrums which had never been heard before, and which served to amuse London drawing-rooms for the next fortnight. M. Duc delivered his famous monologue—‘l’homme qui pleure’—with inimitable verve. Dodo produced his banjo and sang a comic song, which Thérèse had rendered celebrated at the Palais-Royal, and which that enterprising young gentleman had gone to Paris on purpose to learn direct from its illustrious performer. It was his *chef-d’œuvre*—*Pst-Pst—m’amie* ; it was lively ; it was rollicking ; it was audacious ; it went far, a little too far, perhaps, to be quite in good form ; but this was not an occasion to be particular, and anything was better than not being amused. There was a roar of applause as the performance closed.

‘My blushes,’ said Mrs. Araby, ‘like the moonlight, are hidden by the clouds, but I

beg everybody to understand that I am blushing. Dodo, I blush for you.'

'And so do I,' said Mrs. Backhouse; 'I hope he is blushing for himself.'

'I am sorry,' said the duke, 'that I cannot pay you the compliment of blushing, even in the dark. I have forgotten how that juvenile tribute to propriety is paid. Dodo's performance had but a single fault, and a good one—it was too short.'

'It was broader than it was long,' said Florian—'the fashionable shape for comic songs. I vote that we encore it.'

Olivia, little disturbed by the surrounding hilarity, sat peacefully in the gloom, busied with her own thoughts, and enjoying an inward cheerfulness that was all her own.

CHAPTER XXXVI

MISS BOND IS CONFIDENTIAL

‘When the Devil of my youth
Had set me on those mountain peaks of hope,
All glittering with the dawn dew, all erect
And famished for the moon.’

SILENCE reigned in Cosmo's villa. The ladies had vanished to their rooms for the duties of the toilette and the pleasures of repose. Isabella Heriot, for once, was sufficiently tired to be glad of an interval of quiet, and to remember, at her ease, that even an informal occasion demands a well-considered *déshabille*. Mrs. Backhouse was intending to crown the triumphs of the day with a tea-gown, the lovely freshness and flowing outlines of which had not as yet been revealed to mortal eye.

Several of the other ladies would do their best not to be eclipsed by Mrs. Backhouse. Olivia, inspired by no such ambition, was ready to descend long before her cousin had accomplished her preparation for this interesting contest. She was longing to escape. Her room felt oppressive, suffocating. Outside a river breeze was stirring the tree-tops with a delicious murmur. The storm of the afternoon had given place to an exquisite evening. The moon was floating through a fleecy sky. The last clouds were sinking in the horizon. The terrace, the marble steps, the lawns, the river beyond, were bathed in soft floods of light. The garden promised an undisturbed retreat, a solitary half-hour for the rest of weary spirits, the restoration of shattered nerves. Olivia threw a shawl around her and prepared to fly. The hope of solitude, however, was illusory. As Olivia crossed the hall to the wide windows that opened upon the terrace Miss Bond emerged

from the drawing-room. She evidently wished to be confidential.

‘We are the first,’ she said; ‘not a soul is to be found. I was making for the garden. We can sit and talk in the colonnade. Let me come with you.’

‘I have something to say to you,’ continued Miss Bond as soon as they had found a seat. ‘You have not enjoyed to-day. I saw it all. It was not likely that you should. You have disliked us all, and we have deserved disliking. For my part, I am furious with Mrs. Araby for her behaviour. A joke is a joke, but her jokes are past bearing. She has a grudge against Mr. de Renzi—an old grudge. They are sworn foes. But that is no excuse for being brutal, as I consider that she was this morning.’

‘I thought her rather rude,’ said Olivia; ‘but brutal?’

‘She was brutal to all of you,’ said Miss

Bond—‘you, Mr. de Renzi, and poor Theresa Backhouse.’

‘Mrs. Backhouse!’ cried Olivia. ‘What had she to do with it?’

‘Do you not know?’ said her companion. ‘You surely must.’

‘No,’ said Olivia, ‘I know nothing. What is it? Do tell me.’

‘Do you really mean that you do not know that Mrs. Backhouse is dreadfully aggrieved at Mr. de Renzi deserting her? Poor creature, she is inconsolable!’

‘Deserting her!’ cried Olivia. ‘What can you mean? Why, she is a married woman!’

‘Which makes the desertion all the more poignant. Married women like desertion as little as the rest of us. And Mrs. Backhouse’s desertion was a bad one. Mr. de Renzi was devoted to her last season. They were mutually devoted, a real serious, *bonâ-fide* devotion. It lasted till you appeared

upon the scene. Then he threw her over, and was on with the new love before he was off with the old. It is an old trick of his. Mrs. Backhouse, who is sentimental, and vain into the bargain, naturally did not like it. She poses as a martyr, and she is foolish enough to proclaim her misfortunes to all her intimate friends, who naturally think it far too good a joke to keep to themselves. But that is no reason why Mrs. Araby should chaff them both in public, especially with you there to hear it! Yes, it was brutal!’

Olivia sat shuddering in silence.

‘After all,’ continued her companion, alarmed at getting no response, ‘it was nothing remarkable. Anyhow, it is no concern of yours, or of anybody’s, except as a good joke. All the men do it. Poor Theresa Backhouse is not the first, nor will she be the last! As for Mr. de Renzi, he is such an old offender that everybody is delighted to see him caught at last. It was

a triumph to catch him, a real triumph! I envy you!’

Olivia sprang to her feet with the gesture of one who shrinks from a revelation of horror.

‘Now,’ she cried, ‘I see the point of Mrs. Araby’s joke! Thank you for telling me. I agree with you. It was brutal!’

‘I fear that I have shocked you,’ said Miss Bond, in surprise at the vehement seriousness of Olivia’s tone. ‘You must not take things of that sort seriously.’

‘No?’ said Olivia. ‘What, then, are the things which one ought to be serious about when one is going to be married? Is there anything?’

‘Not, at any rate, the flirtations of your husband—past, present, or to come. That is the first law of modern married life. Society has decreed it. But do you mean that you knew nothing—nothing?’

‘Nothing!’ said Olivia. ‘How should I? Those who should enlighten me conspire to

keep me in the dark. What is there to know ?’

‘Forbid it, Innocence !’ cried Miss Bond, ‘that I should tell. I have told you too much already. Forget it. Ignorance is bliss ; such bliss be yours. Here, by the way, is your happy lover approaching, who will owe me an eternal grudge if I rob him of a *tête-à-tête*. I will yield him my place before he discovers me.’

Miss Bond retreated to the house. De Renzi came and took her place. He was in his gayest mood. ‘Olivia mia !’ he cried, ‘and by yourself—

“a lady of the lake,

Sole sitting by the shores of old romance”—

waiting for me to come and be romantic in the moonlight. Tell me now, have you enjoyed it all, despite the rain ?’

‘Pretty well,’ said Olivia ; then suddenly turning to him, ‘No, Claude, I will tell you the truth. I must do so. I have *not*

enjoyed it. I have been wretched. I am in the depths of low spirits.'

De Renzi with difficulty repressed an outbreak of provocation at this unexpected announcement. 'Your spirits are capricious, Olivia. I hoped that you would be pleased. Everybody else has been delighted. You have had everything that human wit can contrive for your enjoyment. What could you wish more? What has been the matter?'

'You must forgive me,' said Olivia. 'I have been ill at ease. Good spirits will not come at command, not at *my* command at any rate.'

'Come now, you dear piece of perversity, admit the truth. You had resolved not to enjoy it, had you not?'

'No,' said Olivia; 'believe me. I was bound to try. I did try. But there are some things which are fatal to good spirits.'

'For instance?' asked De Renzi.

‘A doubt, a suspicion in the heart of a woman who loves. If only you could clear them away from mine!’

‘How can I,’ cried her lover, ‘when I have no notion of the cause? However, be the cause, the fancied cause, what it may, your doubts are baseless, the phantasm of imagination, the forgeries of jealousy!’

‘Well, then,’ said Olivia, ‘I believe that I am jealous!’

‘Jealous!’ cried De Renzi; ‘you jealous, and to me!’

‘Yes,’ said Olivia, ‘that is one of the things that disquiet me. I am jealous.’

‘Impossible!’ cried De Renzi. ‘It is a barbarous passion, fit only for a blackamoor like Othello, and as obsolete as the megatherium. Forswear it, Olivia, I implore you. We shall never have a moment’s peace. I am never jealous! I surrendered you to the duke, to Cosmo, this afternoon, without a pang. And jealousy to me—what a con-

ception! Don't you know that I am fanatically in love with you, and care not a straw for all the other women in the world? What makes you doubt me? What can I do to still your doubts?'

Olivia was in no mood for banter. 'Do you know,' she said, 'that in all our intercourse you have never told me yet one single word about your past?'

'My past!' cried De Renzi, with a mock-heroic air. 'Horrid subject! It is dead, gone, forgotten; leave it to the dust, the ivy, and the bats. I have buried it. Spare me a resurrection!'

'The women you have loved before you loved me—is there no one that I have a right to be jealous of?'

'The women that I have loved!' cried De Renzi with a laugh. 'Olivia, you touch a tender point; you press too far. Suffice it that you are despot, supreme and unquestioned, of a heart that owns no mistress but

yourself. What need you, what would you have more ?’

‘I have just heard something,’ said Olivia, whose seriousness of manner increased as De Renzi took refuge in levity, ‘something which gives a solid form to doubts and suspicions that have been floating in my mind—in my heart. They have been gathering strength ; they have been very strong to-day. I ought to tell it to you. It may be false.’

‘It *is* false,’ cried De Renzi with vehemence, ‘if it is anything that impugns my devotion to you. Tell it me and let me reassure your confidence, since it needs reassurance.’

‘You remember Mrs. Araby’s attack on you this morning ?’

‘Yes,’ said De Renzi, with some uneasiness in his tone ; ‘she is an old witch with the tongue of the devil. She ought to be drowned on a broomstick.’

‘I have been told what she meant—that there is one whom, a few months ago, you were supposed to love, whom you led to love you, whom even now you regard with affection, who regards your marriage as a cruel desertion of herself, and me as the robber of her rights. Tell me if it is so, that I may release you from your engagement.’

‘This is too much!’ cried De Renzi in a passion. ‘You carry your rights too far. I will not be questioned by any one, Olivia, not even by you. There are things on which no man will—no man of honour ought to—submit to be catechised. I decline to say a word as to my past relations to any one, except that I was speaking the truth, as a loyal gentleman, when I offered you my love and asked for yours. There are some friendships which even marriage does not obliterate.’

‘And the desertion?’ asked Olivia.
‘May I disbelieve that part of the story?’

‘You must believe or disbelieve what you please,’ said De Renzi. ‘I decline to be questioned.’

‘It is, surely, no unreasonable question,’ said Olivia, ‘standing as we do to each other.’

‘That is as people think,’ said De Renzi. ‘Anyhow, I will not answer it.’

‘That is answer enough,’ said Olivia. Her voice had the solemnity of a death-sentence.

A gong sounded. Cosmo was standing at the window, and called them. De Renzi started to his feet. It was a welcome staving-off of a crisis, for which neither party was prepared. Both felt that it was a relief that their dispute should be peremptorily brought to a close.

‘We must go,’ De Renzi said. ‘I will come to you the first thing to-morrow. You will feel differently then, I hope.’

Cosmo was awaiting them at the window. ‘Forgive me,’ he said, ‘for interrupting you. Will you take Miss Hillyard in to dinner?’

CHAPTER XXXVII

THE STORM BURSTS

‘Ah ! what a vulgar thing does courage seem, when we see nations buying and selling it at a shilling a day. Ah ! what a sublime thing does courage seem, when some fearful summons on the great deeps of life carries a man, as if running before a hurricane, up to the giddy crest of some tumultuous crisis, from which lie two courses, and a voice says to him audibly, “One way lies hope ; take the other, and mourn for ever !” How grand a triumph if, even then, amid the raving of all around him and the frenzy of the danger, the man is able to confront his situation, is able to retire for a moment into solitude with God, and to seek his counsel from Him.’

THE worst and longest day has its end. Olivia saw the end of hers. The party had dispersed. The gentlemen had gone away to London, De Renzi amongst the rest. The lovely tea-gowns vanished with their owners. Peace reigned in the luxurious

corridors of Cosmo's little palace — peace, and kindly sleep with its sweet anodyne for human woes. In one room of the villa, however, there was no thought of sleep, but the intense activity of throbbing pulses, overwrought nerves, excited brains. Mrs. Heriot had been all day on thorns about Olivia, first disappointed, next angry, finally alarmed. Olivia had belied the brilliant hopes that had been entertained on her behalf. She had tried in vain to hide her gloomy mood. She had not been brilliant, she had not been amusing, she had not been even cheerful. The gentlemen who tried to get on terms with her had retired in discomfiture. The duke, in the course of the morning, had invited her for a stroll, but soon brought her back, and made no further effort at politeness. Mr. Cosmo could make nothing of her. Her rising reputation had sunk to zero. Claude de Renzi must, Mrs. Heriot felt, be annoyed at his future wife playing so

inglorious a part, so completely belying his expectations of what she might and would achieve. Such a lapse was inexcusable. Mrs. Araby's jokes at De Renzi had not, certainly, been in the best of taste; but girls must learn to take a joke, and even a neophyte in the mysteries of polite society might be expected to make allowance for Mrs. Araby. She was a chartered libertine in the matter of conversation. Her witticisms were too racy not to be condoned. Anyhow, resent it or not, as Olivia might think fit, she was bound, in the circumstances, to keep her resentment to herself. But she had shown temper, and shown it in the one way that was unforgivable, by being dull, by being a non-conductor to social electricity. The anxieties of a chaperon are — Mrs. Heriot ruefully acknowledged to herself, as she tapped at the door of Olivia's room—a great deal more serious than people who have not the management of refractory

young beauties are accustomed to believe. Just now Olivia was in a refractory mood, and Mrs. Heriot was too anxious to sleep in peace without ascertaining explicitly to what extent her refractoriness had gone and was about to go.

Her worst anticipations were justified by Olivia's appearance. She was sitting, apparently, just where she had sat down when, half an hour before, she had entered the room. Her hair, which always seized the first opportunity of rebellion, was dishevelled ; her eyes bore the mark of tears ; her cheeks were pale ; her appearance bespoke distress, agitation, the restlessness of perplexity, the courage of despair. Mrs. Heriot thought it well to veil the purpose of her visit by an air of indifference. She put down her candle and began at once to chatter as if she had merely come for a gossip.

‘Are you dreadfully tired, Olivia? For my part, I am dead beat. The morning was

so sultry, and thunder always upsets me ; and what thunder ! It rings in my head still. I shall not be able to sleep for hours, I am certain. But what a Providence that church was ! We saved our dresses, which is something ; but, to tell the truth, I was terrified. I am an arrant coward about lightning when one is out of doors. That last flash actually blinded me. However, the whole thing was delightful, was it not ? Cosmo is really perfect in his own house. You have got over your dislike to him by this time. But, Olivia, what is the matter with you ? You sit there as white as a ghost ; why don't you speak ? Are you feeling faint ?'

'No,' said Olivia, 'it is nothing ; but I am as tired as you are. The day has been too long. I am over-tired. I did not find the picnic as delightful as you did.'

'No ?' said Mrs. Heriot. 'I was afraid you were not enjoying yourself. But they were all kind to you, were they not ?'

‘Kind!’ cried Olivia. ‘What kindness! I thought them detestable.’

‘Come, come,’ said her companion, ‘is not that too sweeping? The American girl’s slang is vulgar, of course, but that is the fun of it: and Mrs. Araby’s jokes and stories! You must not think about them. She is an old offender, and a privileged one. She does it to every one; and no one minds. She has done it from time immemorial. I don’t defend her. If it was any one but Mrs. Araby, people would call her a vulgar old wretch.’

‘She *is* a vulgar old wretch,’ cried Olivia with vehemence, ‘and a cruel one. She tried to wound me, to insult me; she meant it; I could feel it. They are a hateful set, Isabella—bad, coarse, heartless. I have passed a miserable day, and am thoroughly wretched.’

‘You are thoroughly tired,’ said her companion, seriously apprehensive of a coming explosion, ‘and so am I—too tired

to discuss Mrs. Araby. All the same, she was not meaning to be rude to you. She was only chaffing Claude—surely there was no harm in that.’

‘No harm!’ cried Olivia.

‘No harm,’ said Mrs. Heriot with a laugh, taking up her candle and preparing to depart. ‘A little chaff hurts no one; Claude as little as any. He deserves it. Good-night!’

‘Stop!’ cried Olivia; ‘I have something to say to you. I had better say it at once. I will tell you what the harm is.’

‘Well,’ said Mrs. Heriot, coming back and shutting the door, conscious that the much-dreaded crisis had arrived, ‘what is it?’

‘I have heard something to-day,’ said Olivia, ‘which entitles me to ask you a question. What is the story of Claude de Renzi and Mrs. Backhouse? What did Mrs. Araby mean this morning when she raised a laugh at his expense and mine, and Mrs. Backhouse’s?’

‘What?’ said Mrs. Heriot. ‘She meant, I suppose, that Claude de Renzi is about to unite himself to a most impetuous young lady. I wish him joy of you if you intend to behave as you are doing now.’

‘You evade my question,’ said Olivia. ‘What has there been between them? There is something. You have concealed it from me, Isabella. You have not told me the truth. I learnt it to-day by accident. Am I to marry without knowing what it is? Am I to take him blindfold, not knowing whether he is mine; and if mine, when he became so, whether his heart is his own to give me? I have been feeling, for weeks past, that there was something wrong. I felt it most of all to-day. Claude de Renzi is not what I believed, nor am I what he thought. I shall never make him a good wife. Suppose that I were to break off my engagement, Isabella, may I look to you to help me?’

Mrs. Heriot felt the crisis to be indeed

acute. She came and sat down on the sofa by Olivia. For some moments she could not say a word. Surprise, disappointment, anger, alarm, were too much for her. Olivia sat looking at her, intrepid, excited, insistent. At last she spoke. 'Break off your engagement? Olivia, you have taken leave of your senses; you must be wandering; you do not know what you are saying! It is impossible that you can be in earnest!'

'Earnest!' cried Olivia; 'never more bitterly in earnest. It is a question of life or death for me. But would you help me?'

'Help you!' said Mrs. Heriot. 'You may rely upon it that neither I nor Valentine will ever let you do anything so mad. We will never allow it.'

'I feared that it would be so,' said Olivia. 'Have mercy on me, Isabella; I am alone in the world; I am in dire need of help; I must act for myself; it concerns myself alone.'

'Yourself alone!' cried Mrs. Heriot, whose

anger-storm was rapidly gathering to the bursting-point of indignation. ‘Do you know what you are saying? what it is that you talk so glibly about doing? Do you know that it means your ruin, your loss of the best chance a girl in your position ever had—so good that I am constantly lost in astonishment at your good luck? It means disgracing yourself, disgracing us—insulting Claude de Renzi in the face of the world—alienating him—alienating his family—figuring before society as a mad woman! It is impossible, however. You are not yourself; you are overwrought. Go to bed now and to sleep, and wake up, please, in your right mind: but remember that, if by to-morrow morning this piece of lunacy has not quitted you, you will have to go to some other house than mine to commit this frantic act—to offer this gross affront to the man who has loaded you with kindness.’

‘But my question,’ said Olivia. ‘Do you

mean that there has been—that there is nothing between Claude de Renzi and Mrs. Backhouse that ought to make me hesitate if I knew it?’

Mrs. Heriot, in spite of her efforts to preserve an unaltered aspect, coloured up. ‘I do mean it,’ she said vehemently. ‘Are you going to listen to every piece of silly gossip that venomous tongues, like Mrs. Araby’s, set agoing. Theresa Backhouse is an idiot, the worst sort of idiot, a sentimental one. If she chooses to imagine herself in love with De Renzi, what has that to do with you or with him? Plenty of women, I dare say, have been in the same predicament. If she was not a fool she would not care to disgrace herself by such an exhibition. She likes to pose as broken-hearted. She has not sense to see that she is making herself ridiculous. Do you remember that she is a married woman?’

‘Only too well,’ said Olivia; ‘but is it true,

Isabella, that only a few months ago Claude de Renzi was in love with her?’

Mrs. Heriot’s passion at last blazed out. ‘How, in the name of common sense,’ she cried, ‘can I tell, or any one? And if he was, do you expect your husband to have been an innocent all his life, a nursery innocent? to have looked at no woman till you appeared upon the scene? to offer you a virgin heart? Believe me, such men exist nowhere but in goody story-books, nor such women either. They would not be worth twopence if they did. How long is it, Olivia, since you were, or believed yourself, in love with Jack? Think of that and be rational. At any rate, be warned!’

Mrs. Heriot turned and left the room without another word. Olivia, again alone—her cousin’s menace ringing angrily in her ear—set herself to review the position and to rally her resources of fortitude for this crisis of her fate.

CHAPTER XXXVIII

A LOVER'S DOUBT

‘ Let me not to the marriage of true minds
Admit impediments : Love is not love,
Which alters when it alteration finds,
Or bends with the remover to remove.’

DE RENZI travelled home that Sunday night revolving many things. He had been aggrieved by the scene with Olivia—aggrieved and alarmed. She had revealed a new phase of character. De Renzi had no wish for a wife with a grievance—for a wife who would insist too rigidly on what she considered her rights, who would construe those rights exactingly, who would be unhappy if she considered that she did not get her due. The one thing which he did not intend to

do in marriage was to put an inconvenient fetter on his personal liberty. He had no idea of domesticating a recording angel. He intended, by marrying Olivia, to increase his enjoyments, not to surrender his freedom.

Olivia's scruples, demands, doubts, might prove an awkward obstruction in the pleasant journey of existence. He admired, he loved her; but neither love nor admiration would carry him the length of submission to a domestic tyrant. He was making a romantically disinterested marriage. But how if the romance assumed an unexpected phase of severity, of strictness, of immoderate demands, of inconvenient scruples? Was it certain that Claude was not doing what of all things he, no less than his father, detested—making a bad bargain?

De Renzi could not think of his late interview with Olivia without resentment. She had been unreasonable; her demands were

outrageous. To comply with them would be a fatal surrender of all lawful liberties. Olivia was courageous; but then, if one was to marry a courageous woman, it would never do to begin by giving in to her whims, by submitting to defeat. Her husband must be courageous too. Olivia's demands about Mrs. Backhouse were a whim, a jealous whim. He would not gratify it, nor in truth *could* he. He was feeling tender, remorseful about Mrs. Backhouse. He was seriously sorry to have given her pain. Their last interview had been a painful one. Mrs. Backhouse had never looked more lovely; her beautiful azure eyes had filled with tears, and her voice had trembled with ill-suppressed emotion. De Renzi had no touch of the cynical brutality which could sneer at such emotion, or point a rough moral as to the rightful retribution which befalls a married woman who chooses to be idyllic. He had, he was forced to admit to himself, behaved

badly to Mrs. Backhouse—badly according to his own standard of what was right, fair, permissible. He had shown her marked attentions the year before. Their mutual liking had been a recognised fact. Their intimacy—temporarily cut short by Olivia's appearance at the Pines—had speedily revived. It had ripened into a flirtation—unluckily, on Mrs. Backhouse's part, into something more. It was foolish and weak of her, no doubt; but this scarcely made it pleasant for De Renzi. For a time he had been really devoted to her, and had surrendered himself to the agreeable pastime of playing at love—of petting a woman whom nature intended to be petted. Now he had deserted her. She could never, of course, have supposed that their intimacy was to interfere with his marriage when the time arrived. But the time had arrived with unexpected promptitude. Their intimacy had closed with a cruel abruptness. Claude

thought of it with regret and discomfort. Mrs. Backhouse chose to consider herself heart-broken, and, what was worse, to show the broken fragments of her heart to sundry friendly eyes. Nevertheless Claude would stand by her. Nothing should force him to belittle a woman to whom he had paid attention, to ignore his past feelings for her. If, despite of them, he was prepared to marry her, Olivia ought to appreciate the value of the compliment. She could, in reason, demand no further sacrifice. On the other hand, if she proved exacting, unreasonable, and prepared, in case she could not get her own way, to break off the engagement, De Renzi determined that it would not be wise to oppose her resolution.

So ran De Renzi's thoughts as he journeyed Londonwards. On reaching home he went straight to his desk, took out Olivia's portrait, sat gazing at it for some instants, and straightway repented, in mental sackcloth and ashes,

of his resentful mood. Give her up, indeed !
Wayward, uncertain, exacting, oppressive—
what you will—he loved her, and love
welcomes every expedient rather than sur-
render.

CHAPTER XXXIX

FAREWELL

‘ Silvia is too fair, too true, too holy
To be corrupted by my worthless gifts ;
When I protest true loyalty to her,
She twits me with my falsehood to my friend ;
When to her beauty I commend my vows,
She bids me think how I have been forsworn
In breaking faith with Julia whom I loved.’

OLIVIA had spent a sleepless night in becoming more and more frightened. Had Claude met her responsively and sympathetically, the night before, she might still have been reassured, brought back to her allegiance, to hope and happiness, if not to absolute confidence. But the interview had done nothing but intensify her alarm, strengthen her conviction that she was going wrong, and that safety lay only in retreat. Her conversation

with Mrs. Heriot had not tended to soothe her nerves or allay her apprehensions. No word on the subject passed as the two travelled up to town next day.

De Renzi came at the appointed time. His angry mood of the previous night had melted away. He was wishing only for reconciliation. The lover was once more in the ascendant. He had convinced himself that Olivia's jealous mood was excusable, the natural outbreak of lovable waywardness. It could be appeased; poor Theresa Backhouse's fancied wrongs could never be a serious ground of alienation to people who were as much in love as Olivia and himself.

De Renzi, as Olivia came into the room, looking miserable and frightened, yet beautiful, and bearing herself with dignity, felt more than ever that to surrender her would be impossible.

Still, things would not go smoothly.

Olivia was in a more difficult, a more uncompromising mood than on the previous day. She had been making up her mind. She saw clearly what she ought to do; she was nerved to do it. De Renzi felt speedily that the position was serious—defeat a not remote contingency.

‘You must forgive me,’ she said. ‘You have done me many kindnesses. This will be the greatest of all. I have been to blame. Everybody else will blame me, I know. But you must understand and forgive. I told you that I had doubts. I put them aside. I hoped that they would vanish. I tried to believe that they had vanished. I was mistaken. They have still haunted me. Of late they have been stronger than ever. I have tried to silence them.’

‘And in vain?’ said De Renzi.

‘In vain,’ said Olivia; ‘I feel greater doubts now than ever. I ought to tell you, ought I not?’

‘Of course,’ said De Renzi. ‘What is the use of our going on with unexplained doubts between us? Are they doubts about me, or doubts about yourself? Yesterday your doubts were about me. I hope that I convinced you that they were groundless.’

‘Doubts about us both,’ said Olivia; ‘gravest about myself. I distrust myself. I have told you so often. I have moods for which I cannot account—unknown currents that sway me. Of late I have been very unhappy—more unhappy, more anxious, more frightened than ever before in my life. I have been asking myself the cause.’

‘And the answer?’ said De Renzi.

‘The answer, I believe, is that I am going wrong; we both are wrong. You are mistaken in me. I can never, I shall never be all you expect—all you see in me now, or did see in me a little while ago.’

‘All I see now!’ cried Claude. ‘You are as charming to me as you ever were—as

fascinating. But I am changed for you. I am not what you thought.'

'I was too dazzled to think,' said Olivia, 'to see, to judge. You were so good to me—so kind; your praise was so sweet, your will so strong. My will bent before it. I took for granted that you must be right; but I ought to have known.'

'To have known what?'

'To have known that it was impossible for our lives to be in harmony. Our tastes, our beliefs, our standards, are worlds apart. I in my inexperience—you with your full knowledge of every side, except of the sort of life that I have lived—the only one I can live happily. You forgive me for speaking so?'

'Forgive!' said De Renzi; 'I am begging you to speak. For my part, I do not know what these hopeless differences between us are. I know less of life than I supposed. What side of life is it which is so dear to you

and a sealed book to me? Must it always remain a sealed book?’

‘I was bred in a country home,’ answered Olivia, ‘and to village life. My father was a clergyman. We lived in retirement, he and I. I was always amongst the poor; we were very poor ourselves. Religion was our business, our inspiring thought, our consolation in many troubles, our hope. Many things are sacred to me which have no meaning to others; no meaning, I think, to you. Many things are dear, very dear to me, which are less than nothing to you. I have some fears, dreadful fears, which have no terrors for you. They have returned upon me with a vehemence which is like an inspiration. I dare not resist them. I should always be miserable if my life ignored them—if I allowed myself, as I have done too much of late, to live forgetting them. Yesterday brought it home to me. You meant it to be a day of happiness to me, of amusement, pleasure,

success. It was a day of misery. I was wretched. The only happy moments I passed were those when I was kneeling in the little church, when we took refuge from the storm. I then learnt the cause of my unhappiness, and knew that I ought to ask you to release me. I beg you to do so.'

'It is no question of releasing,' said De Renzi; 'I am not fool enough to rest any claim on your promise if your heart belies it. But think before you take a step which must turn the current of both our lives—which would be a cruel blow to me. Last night you mentioned another motive, a motive of jealousy. Are you sure that it is not that which is prompting you?'

'That,' said Olivia, 'is one of our differences; it is a fatal one. I am jealous, I admit. You think it absurd. But I could never alter as to that. I could never accept your view. You think it nothing that another woman is aggrieved at my happiness—a

woman who was but so lately your friend, who loves you now, whom you perhaps still love. I should feel it sacrilege to accept happiness so offered. A curse would be on it and on me. I dare not. Will you release me ?’

‘Release you,’ cried De Renzi, ‘and on such a monstrous ground as that! Never, never! Why spoil both our lives for a fantastic whim of jealousy? for it is fantastic, Olivia—fantastic and baseless. I love and admire you as devoutly as ever woman was loved. You know that I am in love with you, fervently in love. You must know it. I offer you everything I have or shall ever have or be in life—I can do no more. What does it signify what I have been in former times before I loved you? What matter past friendships, past intimacies, past affections, supposing them to have existed? You have effaced them all. I swear to you that they exist no more. I am yours and yours

alone. Why criticise my past? condone it; forget it, as I have forgotten it. If you love me as I do you——'

Olivia put up her hand with a deprecatory gesture, and De Renzi's outburst came suddenly to a standstill.

'What is it?' he asked.

'That "if,"' said Olivia; 'everything turns on that. I have been asking myself: such love as yours demands a careful search and an honest answer.'

'And the honest answer,' said De Renzi, turning pale, for he knew that he was close upon the crisis of his fate; 'tell me the truth.'

'I will tell you the truth,' said Olivia, 'I owe it to you; it is the only reparation I can make. It is a humiliating confession.'

'Confession, indeed! I absolve you beforehand.'

'You can never do that,' said Olivia; 'my offence is unforgivable. When you speak of

loving me as you have just spoken, I feel what a culprit I am ; how guilty I have been. I have suffered, encouraged your love when . . . I cannot return it.'

'I was a fool to say it !' cried De Renzi. 'Of course you do not feel for me as I do for you. How should you ? It is not in nature that you should ; but you must let me love you, worship you. You will be mine at last. Meanwhile I am content.'

'No,' said Olivia, 'believe me, it can never be. I have searched into my heart. I am confident now of what I suspected all along. I wished to love you ; I wished to be your wife, to share your honour, your success, your triumphs. I admired you so much. I was delighted, dazzled, overpowered ; I have felt many things towards you—gratitude, interest, admiration—but not love.'

De Renzi stood silent and motionless, his bloodless cheek alone betraying the intense

excitement which he was struggling to conceal.

‘Not love?’ he said at last; ‘and is it impossible that love should ever come? What is there in our past friendship that tells you that it is impossible?’

‘You keep me on the rack,’ said Olivia. ‘Have mercy; forgive me, I entreat you, and set me free.’

‘You are free,’ said De Renzi; ‘I will torture you no more. Bad as you deem me, I am not bad enough to take advantage of a woman’s promise, nor fool enough to accept a wife who comes to me full of doubts, scruples, and reluctance. Feeling as you do, you are perfectly right to break with me. It is well to do it before marriage instead of after.’

‘Can you forgive me?’ said Olivia.

‘There is nothing to forgive,’ said De Renzi. ‘You have told me the truth; it is bitter, but I thank you for telling it. I shall

think of you always as I have from the first moment I saw you—as I do now—as the most perfect woman I have ever known. Olivia, good-bye.'

Olivia's eyes were swimming with tears ; her hand lingered in De Renzi's.

'Good-bye,' she said in broken tones. 'You have been very good to me ; you are very good to me now. You have my warmest gratitude.'

'Gratitude,' said De Renzi, 'is but the ghost of love. We do well to part. Farewell.'

CHAPTER XL

WAR IS DECLARED

‘But, an’ you will not wed, I’ll pardon you—
Graze where you will, you shall not house with me.
Look to’t, think on’t, I do not use to jest.’

MRS. HERIOT began to feel that the fates were against her. Her husband, when she confided to him the awful intelligence of Olivia’s recusancy, had displayed an unexpected independence, a view of the matter which was wholly unsympathetic, antagonistic to his wife’s. It was another instance, Mrs. Heriot felt, of the way in which Valentine always failed her at a pinch. She could never screw his courage to the sticking place, or silence his inconvenient scruples. He now

declared that Olivia must be left to do exactly what she pleased, and was in no case to be bullied.

‘Bullied!’ said Mrs. Heriot with some contempt in her tone. ‘Who wants to bully her? but warned, I presume, that she is making a fool of herself.’

‘How do we know that she is making a fool of herself?’ said Valentine. ‘She is the only person to judge of that. It is her affair, not ours. Remember, Isabella, I will not have her bullied.’

Mrs. Heriot made no reply. It was no good to argue with such a mood. For herself, if bullying could have prevented Olivia from throwing away a splendid prize, in mere caprice, Mrs. Heriot would have applied the most drastic form of it within her reach. She despised her husband; she sometimes felt inclined to hate him; she hated him now. Once more he was falling short of what might be expected of a reasonable being;

and unreasonableness, especially in a person whom one is obliged to obey, is always hateful.

It was expedient, however, Mrs. Heriot felt, to approach Olivia with other methods than the off-hand brutality of the previous night. The only chance lay in being conciliatory; and Mrs. Heriot, who had been watching nervously for De Renzi's departure, came, a few minutes later, into the drawing-room with gentle tones and looks, bent evidently on a policy of conciliation.

Olivia was sitting where De Renzi had left her, looking the picture of despair.

'Well, Olivia,' Mrs. Heriot said, 'have you two young people made up your quarrel satisfactorily? Why, I should like to know, are lovers such a quarrelsome race?'

'It is no case of quarrel,' said Olivia disconsolately; 'it is all at an end, Isabella. Mr. de Renzi has been most kind to me about it, but he quite agrees with me that, feeling as I do, it is impossible for me to go

on. It would be certain unhappiness for us both.'

'And you parted as friends?' asked Mrs. Heriot, fairly staggered by the explicitness of the announcement, and clinging to every remnant of hope in an almost desperate case.

'As good friends,' said Olivia. 'Mr. de Renzi thanked me for acting as I did.'

'He thanked you!' said Mrs. Heriot. 'Then reconciliation must be possible, surely?'

'We have nothing to reconcile,' said Olivia; 'we are agreed. I told him all my feelings about it.'

'What feelings?' cried Mrs. Heriot, with whom the warnings of prudence and her husband's injunctions were rapidly giving way before a gathering tempest of scorn and resentment: 'what feelings are these that have come so inconveniently to light at this stage of the proceedings? I have never heard of them before.'

‘No,’ said Olivia, ‘I have done my best to conceal them from every one—from Mr. de Renzi, from you, from myself, unhappily, till now. Isabella, have compassion on me! I have been disgracefully weak. I ought to have refused him at first: but I wished for him, I wished to love him. I told him then, I told you, that I felt in doubt. That feeling of doubt has never ceased. It has grown deeper and deeper. Now it fills me with terror; or rather, I doubt no more.’

‘I cannot understand it,’ said Mrs. Heriot; ‘you have had a most happy courtship, surely—a devoted lover, a delightful one. What have you discovered?’

‘I told you,’ said Olivia, ‘that, somewhere in my nature, a Puritan was stowed away.’

‘A Puritan!’ cried the other, more and more lost in amazement; ‘what does it mean?’

‘It means remorse, melancholy, terror, repentance, contempt for many of their

ambitions, hatred for many of their pleasures, a dread of many things that they say and do with a light heart. It makes me unintelligible to those who have not got the key ; unintelligible to myself sometimes. For weeks past I have lived in the midst of pleasures ; they have been the saddest of my life. Since Mr. de Renzi released me I feel a burthen off my soul. It was crushing me.'

'And you really mean that for this—I do not know what to call it—this fit of Methodism, you have thrown away your chance, your splendid chance.'

'Seriously and finally,' said Olivia ; ' Mr. de Renzi will, I am certain, never renew the subject. He released me, he forgave me. That is why I say he has been so kind.'

'He released you!' cried Mrs. Heriot aghast. 'Olivia, you are a most extraordinary girl and a most ungrateful one!'

'No,' said Olivia. 'Believe me. Mr. de Renzi does not think so, nor I hope will you.'

Mrs. Heriot burst into a scornful laugh.

‘It is worse than ingratitude. You have made a fool of me. I have been a good friend to you. I have devoted time, strength, money, all to your advancement in the world. I have helped you to a splendid match. Meanwhile you have been amusing yourself by deceiving us all.’

‘Deceiving you?’ cried Olivia, starting to her feet.

‘Deceiving me, Valentine, Mr. de Renzi, everybody. What do you suppose I brought you to London for?’

‘I thought it was out of kindness,’ said Olivia. ‘It was very kind of you. You have been my good friend, as you say. I cannot thank you enough. I am grieved, most grieved, to have vexed you.’

‘Vexed me!’ cried Mrs. Heriot; ‘and you come now and talk nonsense about your Puritan—nonsense that a child would blush at. Puritan indeed! You are a proficient,

Olivia. I have known many women who are good hands at it, but you are the most accomplished flirt I have ever come across. You are a marvel. All London will be chattering about you this evening. But I will have no more of it. I give you till to-night to reconsider.'

'It is useless,' said Olivia, 'I have said the last word.'

'And this is my last word,' said Mrs. Heriot, passion and despair at last carrying everything before them; 'you are a mad woman, and your madness is of a dangerous species.'

'Spare me,' said Olivia, rising and moving towards the door; 'I am not feeling well. You have been very kind to me in times past. I am grateful, most sincerely grateful for your kindness. But that gives you no right to insult me now in my moment of trial.'

Mrs. Heriot—her cheek pale, her lips tight drawn, her steely gray eyes flashing—

stood like a baffled fury. 'You remember what I said last night?'

'I remember it,' said Olivia; 'I will obey you.'

At this moment a servant announced that Dr. Crucible had called, and had sent up to know if Miss Hillyard was at home.

CHAPTER XLI

A FRIEND IN NEED

‘Fain would I something say, yet to what end?
Thou hast nor ear nor soul to apprehend
The sublime motion and high mystery
And serious doctrine of virginity.
And thou art worthy that thou should’st not know
More happiness than is thy present lot.
Enjoy your dear wit and gay rhetoric,
That hath so well been taught her dazzling fence,
Thou art not fit to hear thyself convinced.’

DR. CRUCIBLE’S daily arrival at the Museum was a matter of absolute regularity. His occasional absences were events, the solemnity of which was emphasised by elaborate arrangements and formal notification. On this eventful Monday, however, without a note of warning, he failed to appear at his accustomed hour. A class of students which had

assembled in the hope of enlightenment on the co-relation of Forces, waited, grumbled, and separated at last with muttered objurgations at their truant instructor's unexampled unpunctuality. When, several hours behind his time, the doctor put in an appearance, it was obvious that he was the victim of an agitation which not all his stoicism would enable him wholly to conceal. Something very unusual must, his alarmed subordinates surmised, have occurred to produce so marked a disturbance in the tranquil flow of Dr. Crucible's official life. Those who knew him, and did not know the potent forces that were at work, might well be lost in amazement. Was the doctor going out of his mind? or—what most of his friends would have considered much the same thing—was he going to be married? or what?

The truth was that Dr. Crucible had passed a most exciting morning. He was accustomed to pride himself on the well-adjusted existence

of a philosopher ; but before he had finished breakfast a letter had arrived from Olivia which upset his philosophic equilibrium beyond all hopes of recovery. Olivia always touched him in a tender spot. Ever since her visit to Lady Heriot they had been sworn friends. He had protested against her alliance with Mrs. Valentine Heriot as a deplorable defection—a mistake from which rude experience would, sooner or later, awaken her. He denounced her engagement as the scandalous achievement of Mrs. Heriot's worldly contrivance. Olivia now wrote in great distress. Her letter seemed like a cry for pity—for help. She was in the most dreadful difficulty. She had at last, she said, after many searchings of heart, made up her mind that her engagement must be broken off. Every one would, she well knew, oppose her change of mind and condemn it ; and no wonder. No one would understand the cause. Mrs. Heriot especially, to whom

she was under great obligations, was furious at the bare suggestion. The prospect was alarming. There was a dreadful time before her to go through, a dreadful battle to fight. 'I am alone; I have no friend here; I have no adviser; no one to sympathise; no one to help me. Such friends as I have will all be against me. Isabella Heriot will be turned from friend to foe. I dread encountering her. I am to be sent away unless I submit; but I can never submit. Will you come and see me?'

The note of distress throughout the letter was acute. It moved the doctor to his heart's core. It appealed to all his paternal fondness for Olivia; but it did something more—it filled him with the exultation of an ardent warrior, who knows that the long-desired moment of combat has at last arrived. It sounded a very tocsin in his ears. It was a trumpet-call for the assault—the assault that he had so long panted to deliver, that he had

so often, in thoughts to which the wish was father, imagined himself delivering. Dr. Crucible did not like De Renzi. He cordially detested Mrs. Heriot. He had discussed all the story of the will with Lydia Hazelden, and unhesitatingly espoused her prejudices and convictions on the subject. He was satisfied that the codicil had been brought about by some infamous means, and that Isabella was the culprit. His old friend's last hours had been darkened, her real intentions defeated by this abandoned schemer. Sir Adrian's fortunes had received a mortal blow. His favourite, Jack, had been vilely ousted from his rights. The doctor's soul grew black whenever the subject crossed his thoughts. He predicted the most awful retribution on Mrs. Heriot's guilt. Metaphorically speaking, he thirsted for her blood. He would have liked to put his foot upon her neck—that much admired, much bedizened neck. His vengeance had hitherto

been restricted to an impotent indulgence in abuse of the object of his wrath—calling her Canidia, Messalina, Borgia, and other evil names behind her back. But he was now to meet Canidia face to face. *Væ victis!* Dr. Crucible summoned a hansom, and drove away merrily for the battlefield, and arrived opportunely as the encounter between Mrs. Heriot and Olivia had reached that critical stage at which the intervention of a third party would turn the fortunes of the day.

CHAPTER XLII

STONEHOUSE DENOUNCES A JOB

‘Avouons au moins que nous devons à l’infortune le plus cher de nos rêves, celui du bonheur : car un sourire n’est qu’une larme qui sèche : la joie n’est qu’un chagrin qui se calme.’

THAT night Dr. Crucible and Stonehouse were dining together at the Parthenon, and Crucible, proud of his morning’s achievement, and of the possession of a really interesting piece of gossip, lost no time in communicating it to his companion.

‘Have you heard about De Renzi?’ he asked. ‘His match with the young beauty is broken off. You remember her two years ago in Seymour Street?’

‘Remember her?’ said Stonehouse. ‘Do

you think I am a stock-fish? I had the honour of taking her to the play—a charming girl, bright, clever, and good—too good for the De Renzis to smelt in their gold-pots. I hope that she is not broken-hearted about it?’

‘Broken-hearted!’ cried Crucible. ‘It is *she* that has broken off the match. She found that she did not like him.’

Stonehouse poured out a glass of port with an air of mock solemnity.

‘I drink to her good health. I applaud her courage; it is a courageous act.’

‘I join in the toast,’ said the doctor, gleefully replenishing his glass. ‘If she cares about money, there are plenty of young plutocrats with as much fortune as De Renzi and a better reputation.’

‘Yes,’ said Stonehouse,

“Uno avulso, non deficit alter
Aureus, et simili frondescet virga metallo—”

The golden tree of London has a never-

failing supply of precious branches. May she find one to her taste !’

‘ I do not join in that,’ said Crucible. ‘ For my part, I should like her to marry her cousin, Jack Heriot, who has been in love with her ever since he was a lad.’

‘ Ah,’ observed Stonehouse, ‘ but that won’t do. Master Jack has got to put to something in the family pot. If he wants to keep Huntsham, he must find some of these golden young ladies to keep house with—somebody who, besides looking pretty, will pay his butcher’s and baker’s bills for him.’

‘ Humph !’ said the doctor ; ‘ I should have thought that the Heriots had had enough of that sort of thing, with Valentine’s experience and his stucco wife. I saw that horrible woman this morning. She has pillage written in her eyes—pillage and fury ! She fought like a very dragon, but I rescued Andromeda.’

‘ And what have you done with her, now

that she is rescued?' asked Stonehouse. 'Your rescued heroine is apt to be embarrassing to her deliverer. Have you got her on the premises? Because, if so, I will come home to tea with you.'

'Profane!' said Dr. Crucible. 'I have handed her over to Mrs. Hazelden, who consented, like a good angel, to befriend her. She needs a refuge and consolation. The encounter with the dragon has shattered her.'

'And the loss of a lover!' said Stonehouse. 'But she will recover, you will see; Andromedas of twenty generally do. How delighted old Sir Raphael will be! Everybody will vow that he contrived it.'

'But about Jack Heriot now,' said Crucible; 'he cannot go on all his life playing at art and socialism. It is not respectable. Fancy a Heriot in a velveteen jacket with his hair down his back!'

'We live in an epoch of revolution,' said Stonehouse. 'If young Heriot chooses to let

down his back hair, I should not concern myself. The Spartans did it before their battles. Artists live and prosper nowadays. They immortalise Lord Mayors and smart ladies—they illustrate the magazines, and, I observe, the advertisements. Millais's boy is for ever blowing Pears's soap-bubbles in my face. I am haunted, on my road to chambers every morning, by a colossal atrocity, who leers at me over several acres of naked shoulder, amid a Niagara of golden hair. I daresay some fellow got well paid for painting her. Why should not Jack make a living at it ?'

'It is a Bohemian existence,' objected Crucible.

'I like the Bohemians,' replied Stonehouse ; 'we want more of them. Human life is growing too precise. We are all of us infernal prigs. Respectability, as some one said of the Boston streets, stalks amongst us unabashed.'

‘Well,’ said Crucible, ‘the long and the short of it—if you will have it—is that I have another plan in my head for him. Should you be surprised to hear that Lord Melrose has carried his way with the Museum Commissioners, and that they have, at last, consented to allow me a librarian?’

‘Stop!’ cried Stonehouse; ‘I refuse to listen. Thou corrupter of youth, thou jobber! Tell not your nefarious deeds of darkness to an honest man over his port.’

‘A librarian,’ continued Crucible, quite unabashed by the other’s invective, ‘£500 a year, quarters in the Museum, and as many coals and candles as you please. The only difficulty is to find the proper man. Lord Melrose is good enough to leave the nomination entirely to me.’

‘Well,’ said Stonehouse, ‘and what are the essentials of a librarian? Youth, ignorance, flightiness, to have thrashed a policeman, to be son of a broken-down baronet

and the lover of a pretty girl. Can such a man be found? By the way, are you sure that Jack Heriot can read? It is desirable, I believe, that a librarian should possess that accomplishment.'

'Read!' cried Crucible with scorn. 'A librarian—*my* librarian, must have a touch of genius; he must not be a pedant; he must not be a bore; he must be young, or he will not be malleable, and malleability is indispensable; he must be a gentleman; he must be a scholar; he must be a university man, a cultured man, a companionable man, with whom I can go and chat about the books——'

'And,' said Stonehouse, 'he must have a charming young wife, with whom you can go and chat about the babies! Thou double-dyed jobster, deem not that thou wilt escape unscathed! A virtuous press shall expose thy iniquity—a virtuous patriot, one Stonehouse to wit, shall denounce

thee to a shuddering senate — “*Quosque tandem, Crucibille, nostrâ abutere patientiâ ?*” Society——’

‘Society,’ said Crucible, ‘will come to tea, and talk about the babies. Providentially there is a gallery, now wasted on fossils, which can be cut up into a nursery when the time arrives. I have arranged it already.’

‘Well,’ said Stonehouse, ‘it is a fortunate thing for the young, amorous, and improvident that there are some men who will stick at nothing in the shape of crime—“*Ces amis de famille sont capables de tout.*” But since you will do it, you may as well have my blessing on the job. Have you told the young person ?’

‘Jack Heriot ? I am to see him to-morrow. As likely as not he will refuse it.’

‘As likely as not,’ said Stonehouse, ‘he will do nothing of the kind, especially when he hears about the nurseries.’

‘His first question,’ Crucible said sententiously, ‘will, I know, be as to his fitness for the post. He is excessively conscientious.’

‘Of course,’ said Stonehouse, ‘that always is the first question with the lucky one whose friends job him into a sinecure. What a comfort that he is so fit! Once in harness, he will go straight enough, no doubt.’

‘He will never go straight,’ said Crucible, ‘if by “straight” you mean humdrum; but he is none the worse for that! He will never be humdrum! He has ideas and aspirations of his own—a something in his head, a touch of poetry, a touch of originality. He is a nympholept! Sometime or other he has caught sight of an unearthly presence flitting through the forest glades, a glimpse of a white flowing skirt——’

‘A glimpse of Olivia’s petticoat,’ cried Stonehouse with irreverent bursts of laughter.

‘He’ll catch her fast enough when once you have given him the place. Meantime, when the papers attack you, you can explain that he is a nympholept. It is a new apology.’

‘And no bad one,’ said Crucible. ‘I am one of the old school in love matters, and believe that the best chance for a young fellow is to have an ideal—an ideal woman, and to be resolved to win her.’

‘You are a nympholept yourself,’ cried Stonehouse, ‘and a match-maker to boot! I daresay you have already been conspiring with Master Jack.’

‘Conspirators,’ said Crucible with complacency, ‘are not in the habit of disclosing their plots at their clubs after dinner. We shall see what will come of it.’

The truth was that Crucible had already written to Jack to come and see him, and the next morning that young gentleman, who had long found the doctor an excellent

confidant, made his appearance at breakfast-time, and was skilfully prepared by his host for the fateful announcement. He was, as it happened, in the depths of low spirits.

‘How goes the world with you, Jack, and your painting?’ the doctor asked. ‘Is the masterpiece forthcoming?’

‘The masterpiece!’ cried Jack disconsolately; ‘I am just learning enough to know what masterpieces mean, and why it is that only one man in a million achieves one, and why I never should if I tried for a century. The fact is, doctor, to do anything respectable in art you must have genius. Few are the happy ones who possess it! I have not a touch of it. I can ride, I can shoot, I could dig if I got the chance, but paint I cannot. I can be nothing but a drudge, and the drudges are too numerous already. What does it matter? It is only one knock the more. I have had some hard ones, have I not? I have put

a bold face on it, but, to tell you the truth, I feel rather beaten.'

'Never say die !' cried the doctor ; 'you are not beaten yet, Jack, or within a hundred miles of it. Who knows when the luck will turn ?'

'How can the luck turn for me ?' said the other ; 'and why should I care about its turning ? I ought to care, I suppose ; but I am hard hit, very hard. I went to see Olivia the other day, and take her my wedding offering. I have had a bad time since then. I ought not to have gone, but, like a fool, I went ; I could not help it. I have paid dearly for my folly. I love her ten times more than ever. She was sweet to me. She spoke with tears in her eyes. I believe she is being forced into it. Aunt Valentine is forcing her. I am powerless to save her.'

'Well,' said the doctor, who considered that the proper moment for the revelation

had arrived, 'now I have something to tell you. She has saved herself. She sent for me yesterday about it. She has broken off her engagement.'

'She has!' cried Jack, jumping up and seizing the doctor's hand. 'Thank God for that; and thank you for telling me. You are sure? Aunt Isabella is a deep one.'

'You are right, Jack, your aunt is a deep one. I had the satisfaction yesterday of seeing her, for once, out of her depth. It is a bad business for Olivia though, is it not? What will become of her, poor girl?'

'Ah!' cried Jack, flushing hot with excitement and already on the sunny pinnacles of hope; 'but she is well out of that business, at any rate. It was Canidia's contrivance. I saw it all along. She would never have been happy. I know him and I know her. It would have been an unhappy marriage.'

'Well,' said the doctor, 'she is resolved, at any rate, not to make the experiment.'

She is not likely to get another chance of making it again in a hurry. Young millionaires and rising statesmen are not to be had for the asking. De Renzi is an enormous catch.'

'De Renzi,' cried Jack, 'is a—but no; he is a trump—an angel for letting her find him out in time and for giving her a lesson. He will have sickened her of wealth.'

'Who knows?' said the doctor, who was not incapable of a teasing mood; 'perhaps she has a still richer man in her eye. Girls have done such things before now.'

'You know she has nothing of the sort,' cried Jack; 'she is as good as gold.'

'She means to be a duchess,' said his persecutor; 'I am convinced. Why not? There are several young marquesses available. She wants a dukedom.'

'She wants a fiddlestick!' cried Jack. 'She has not defied Aunt Isabella and all her works for that.'

‘ But now for business,’ said Crucible ; ‘ I did not send for you to discuss Olivia’s love affairs.’

‘ Did you not ? ’ cried Jack, who at that moment was incapable of fancying anything else in the world that could so well deserve discussion. ‘ Then what did you want me for ? ’

‘ I want you for business,’ said the doctor, ‘ a business matter of importance. I want your assistance. I have a post to give away. I have been commissioned to look out for a librarian for the Museum. The work will be heavy ; the salary is small ; £500 a year and quarters in the building. Probably only a man devoted to science for its own sake would be prepared to make the sacrifice of accepting it. Can you help me to a choice ? ’

.

Jack went away presently, the happiest, hopefulest young fellow in London. The luck had turned indeed. His troubles were

forgotten. Life lay before him, rosy with delightful possibilities. The world had suddenly grown bright. Hope flooded the scene with golden rays. Olivia was free. Olivia might yet be won. 'Never say die,' indeed! No one of all the thousands of stalwart lads, who hurried through London's streets that morning to their daily task at the great wheel of life, felt less like saying it.

A week later Jack was established at the Museum in a wilderness of learned volumes, and had set himself manfully to the task of reducing them to order. Crucible took him over the Museum and explained to him the geography of his new home.

'What is this?' asked the new librarian, as they passed into a long gallery, to which piles of fossils, heaped about in chaotic profusion, gave a neglected air. 'Is this part of my kingdom?'

'Not at present,' said the doctor; 'these are some palæozoic friends of mine, and have

no business here at all. I intend to replace them by some of the more recent mammals. Some day, if the librarian should be a married man, and should happen to require it, this will be the nursery.'

CHAPTER XLIII

DR. CRUCIBLE AS A DIPLOMATIST

‘ I cannot love him ;
Yet I suppose him virtuous, know him noble,
Of great estate, of just and stainless youth,
In voices well divulged, free, learned, valiant,
And in dimension and the shape of nature
A gracious person : but yet I cannot love him ;
He might have took his answer long ago.’

No one ever knew, for Crucible refused to divulge them, the details of the encounter between Mrs. Heriot and himself. It is certain, however, that the doctor stood to his guns like a man, undeterred by Mrs. Heriot's wrath, and that the battle ended in his carrying off Olivia in triumph to his chambers in the Albany. Having established his guest in such comfort as bachelor quarters allow,

the doctor started off to Mrs. Hazelden's to enlist that lady's assistance in disposing of his guest.

Dr. Crucible had need of all his diplomacy and all the weight of an old-standing family friendship when he essayed to induce Mrs. Hazelden to give Olivia a refuge. She came from a suspicious quarter—a deserter from the enemy's camp. Of all houses in London her sister-in-law's was the last to which Mrs. Hazelden would naturally have gone to find a friend or a dependant. Isabella, if she was nothing worse, was the incarnation of vulgar smartness. She was showy, she was worldly, she was unscrupulous; everything, in fact, that a young girl's guardian ought not to be. She had adopted Olivia, and given her a couple of years of her precious advice and example.

‘Olivia,’ Mrs. Hazelden now said decisively, ‘must by this time be completely spoilt.’

‘I tell you,’ said the doctor gallantly, ‘that nothing could spoil her, not even such a chaperon as Mrs. Heriot. Does her behaviour look like it? She is as good now as she was two years ago, when your mother was so fond of her.’

‘I have no time for maidens all forlorn,’ said Mrs. Hazelden; ‘no time and no taste. They are quite out of my line. I don’t like love affairs, unsuccessful ones least of all. I should not know what to do with her.’

‘But what am *I* to do with her?’ pleaded Crucible. ‘You cannot leave a young creature like that to shift for herself.’

‘She will flirt with my boys,’ said Mrs. Hazelden. ‘She will turn their foolish heads, as once upon a time she turned poor Jack’s.’

‘Happily,’ said the doctor, ‘the big ones are away, and the little ones are too little to be in any danger; but she will teach them as much Greek and Latin as you please.’

‘If she can do that she will be a benefactress!’ cried Mrs. Hazelden; ‘it is more than I can do. They are idle little rascals, spoilt with soft living and too many holidays. As for learning anything, they cannot even spell their mother tongue.’

‘Olivia will soon put that to rights. Spelling is one of her strong points. She has so many.’

‘A first-rate champion among the rest,’ said Mrs. Hazelden. ‘She is a paragon, no doubt; but paragons are troublesome inmates. Why should I undertake her?’

‘Why?’ cried Crucible. ‘Because, my dear lady, she is in trouble and needs your help, and deserves it. Your mother loved her; she would have rejoiced to help her. Do as she would have done. Show what you think of Isabella Heriot’s proceeding in turning her adrift. I can conceive nothing that she would dislike so much as that you should harbour Olivia just now.’

‘Then I will certainly do so,’ said Mrs. Hazelden, pleased to find a cross-grained excuse for a good-natured act; ‘you may bring her when you please.’

‘You are a good woman!’ cried Crucible, seizing her hand; ‘your mother’s true daughter. I will go and bring her to you at once. God bless you for helping her!’

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Olivia soon satisfied her hostess that she had not been spoilt. She carried herself bravely, and betrayed not the slightest symptom of being broken-hearted. No one could have worn less of the air of the maiden all forlorn. She set to work in real earnest with the two small boys, who were at home for the holidays, and who speedily declared themselves ready to do anything, even vulgar fractions and dictation, that Olivia wished. Mrs. Hazelden, after holding her at arm’s length for some days, at last threw away her suspicions and began to grow confidential.

Olivia found herself surprised into the awful topic of her engagement.

‘Do you think I was excessively to blame?’ Olivia ventured, with some trepidation, to inquire.

‘Excessively,’ said Mrs. Hazelden; ‘you have let a fine fortune slip out of your fingers, and spoilt one of Isabella’s plans! How can I forgive you? But, seriously, Olivia, do you wish to know what I think about you?’

‘Yes,’ said Olivia; ‘that is, if it will do me good to know it. But remember, please, that I am in need of consolation, not reproach. I can do that for myself.’

‘Well,’ said Mrs. Hazelden, suddenly growing serious, ‘I will tell you. If my esteem, Olivia, my warm regard, my hearty sympathy and approval will console you, you may be consoled. Do I think you to blame, indeed? Do I think courage to blame, and reason, and honour, and the brave resolve to

save yourself, at whatever cost, from a life of unhappiness and turpitude ?’

‘Turpitude !’ cried Olivia.

‘It is a strong word,’ said the other, ‘is it not ? but none too strong for the lives that women like Isabella Heriot lead,—their aims, their motives, their pleasures. She wanted to make them yours, Olivia. Your peril was great. I rejoice to think that you have escaped. You are meant for better things ; they will come in due time.’

‘You are a good consoler,’ said Olivia, laying her hand fondly on Mrs. Hazelden’s ; ‘some of the good things have come already. I feel stronger and better for my life with you. I am happy here. You will always be my friend, will you not ?’

‘Always,’ said Mrs. Hazelden, ‘so long as you do not make friends with the mammon of unrighteousness. When you do that, you will have to give me up. The mammon of unrighteousness of our day is, to

my taste, bad of its kind—sordid, despicable, to be abhorred. You have seen it; you know enough.’

‘I know enough,’ said Olivia, ‘to wish to know no more. Isabella preached me a rough lesson.’

‘A rough lesson,’ said the other, ‘and a wholesome one. She is a sermon in herself, a brilliant instance, a true daughter of her age—the age of self-indulgence.’

CHAPTER XLIV

VETERIS VESTIGIA FLAMMÆ

‘But besides those, who make good in our imagination the place of Muses and of Delphic sibyls, are there not women who fill our vase with wine and roses to the brim, so that the wine runs over and fills the house with perfume: who inspire us with courtesy; who unloose our tongues and we speak; who anoint our eyes and we see? We say things we never thought to have said; for once our walls of reserve vanished, and left us at large; we were children playing with children in a wide field of flowers. “Steep us,” we cried, “in these influences for days and weeks, and we shall be sunny poets, and will write out in many-coloured words the romance that you are.”’

WHETHER Mr. Emerson’s high-flown description of the charming woman’s influences on human nerves and brain was a day-dream of his own poetic temperament, or is a veracious portraiture of processes which actually occur among mortals, is a question which, for

obvious reasons, it is expedient to leave undetermined. Few men, certainly, are known to their contemporaries to go about in this ecstatic plight with loosened tongues and bliss-anointed eyes, crying out to be steeped in celestial influences. But then it is possible that the women, capable of producing such delicious enthrallment, may also be few. That such women exist, is certain. Every man probably knows one at least, and tastes differ. M. Sainte Beuve, who ought to know, declares it to be impossible to write about women without first putting oneself in a good humour by thinking of Madame de Sévigné. Madame de Sévigné's husband, on the other hand, did not care about her. Rousseau, at the time he was firing the sentiment of Europe, declared his Theresa delightful, despite her dirt, ignorance, and stupidity ; as afterwards, no doubt, did Theresa's second lord, the congenial stable-boy. Be this as it may, Jack Heriot was

enthralled. Olivia was his muse, his sibyl, his inspiring genius, his all-dominating influence. When he was with her, his rose-crowned cup ran over with bliss. When he left her, he carried away an enchanted memory. The only drawback was that the period of existence, during which he had to content himself with the pleasures of memory, was so vastly in excess of that in which the actual fruition of his adored one's presence was vouchsafed. Olivia was but seldom to be seen. His aunt's door was not open to him with the ready hospitality of other times.

‘Now, Jack,’ Mrs. Hazelden had said in her brusque fashion, ‘don’t you be coming here too often; I cannot have idle boys about the house.’

‘I am not an idle boy,’ said Jack, ‘but a studious man—tremendously studious.’

‘And so is Olivia,’ said his aunt; ‘she is busy with the children’s lessons and her own,

I should hope. She is trying to catch up all the time your aunt has made her work. She wishes to study.'

'Yes,' said Jack, 'I have seen her studying—

"a student air,
With a look half sad, half saintly,
Grave sweet eyes, and flowing hair"—

Aunt Lydia, don't be hard upon me. I am a fool. I cannot help it. She is a woman to worship.'

'Jack, dear fellow,' said his aunt, looking at him with kindly, compassionate eyes, 'take my advice, and don't come here too often, and, still more, don't be too affectionate, "*Chi va lento, va sano: chi va sano, va lontano*"—one false step and you will spoil your chance.'

'Then,' said Jack, catching at the first straw which offered, 'you think I have a chance?'

'No,' said his aunt, 'I did not mean that.

I meant that you may make it impossible that you ever should have one. I came upon a good remark somewhere the other day which I commend to you, namely, that men are slow, in their conceit, to recognise what a valuable ally in their love-making they might make of distance. It lends enchantment to the view.'

'Distance!' cried Jack. 'That is a bitter remedy.'

'Most good remedies are,' said his aunt. 'If you want her, Jack, go the right way about it, and begin by not being in a hurry! Olivia is in no mood just now for love-making. Come when I ask you. You do really want her, don't you?'

'Want her!' cried Jack, who was by this time perfectly incapable of talking rationally on the subject—'Want her! Ah, Aunt Lydia, if you only knew how much, and for how long I have wanted her! You must help me, will you not?'

‘Well,’ said his aunt, ‘I am helping you now, when I tell you to make yourself reasonably scarce, and not to waste my mornings and hers. Ah, there is the bell! As you are here, I must, I suppose, allow you to stay for lunch.’

It had always been part of Jack’s boyish creed that, despite her austerity of doctrine, his Aunt Lydia was, *au fond*, ‘a brick.’ Never had he more heartily subscribed to that belief than now; and while he was still mentally blessing her, Olivia came in from a walk in the park with the children, looking like a young goddess—fresh, radiant, beautiful, raining her genial influences in generous profusion on all around her—firing Jack’s young blood, filling his heart with a thrill of admiration, a rush of eager desire and hope. ‘Want her?’ ‘Wait for her?’ Live for her, die for her! What was he not ready to do, to dare, to suffer, if only this fair creature might one day be his!

One practical step towards the accomplishment of his happiness it was open to Jack to take forthwith. It was a relief to take it. When he went, next day, to Hunts-ham to tell his parents of the good fortune which, by Crucible's intervention, had befallen him, Lady Eugenia thought it incumbent on her, as a good mother, to improve the occasion by renewing the suggestion which she had often heretofore made in vain—that Jack's way to comfort and happiness lay in the direction of a judicious marriage. She had several young ladies on her list, all of whom she considered eligible. Jack, she was convinced, as became a partial mother, could not fail to be a welcome wooer. Now, too, besides an agreeable person and a prospective baronetcy, Jack had the additional recommendation of a respectable official post to offer to the destined sharer of his affections. It seemed more than ever equitable that the young lady honoured by

Jack's selection should, on her part, bring an equivalent in the shape of solid wealth.

‘It is what everybody has to do,’ Lady Eugenia said ; ‘ what, in fact, everybody not born to a fortune does. How else, I should like to know, is a gentleman to live ? ’

Lady Eugenia, in numberless communings with her own heart on the subject, had convinced herself that no satisfactory answer could be given to this question, and, accordingly, that her point was proved. It was a surprise, a mortification now to find that it carried no conviction to Jack's too stubborn understanding.

‘How is a gentleman to live ?’ he said in disrespectful tones. ‘By earning a livelihood, like an honest man, or, if he cannot do that, by going without it. Worse things might happen.’

‘Well,’ said Lady Eugenia, her armoury of argument fairly exhausted, ‘you do not suppose you can live on £500 a year, do you ?’

‘Why not?’ cried Jack. ‘Anyhow, I mean to try, and to get Olivia to try with me, if I can. Do not talk to me, please, about any other girl. I don’t care a straw for one of them; it is Olivia or nobody for me. I have waited a long time, mother; I have done all that you and father asked me; now you must take my part. I can never give her up.’

Lady Eugenia was an easy conquest, and once conquered became a vigorous ally. Sir Adrian showed more obduracy. His mind was difficult to move. He hated the idea of Olivia as a daughter-in-law. She had gone over to the enemy. Such a defection was unforgivable. She had joined Isabella Heriot, had become her dependant, had accepted her favours, and had, no doubt, imbibed her principles. Who could tell what baneful arts, what vile and dangerous secrets that abandoned worldling might not have taught her? Her engagement to De Renzi implied a sordid ambition, her breach of it a

fickle temper. Sir Adrian committed himself more and more zealously to the task of proving that Olivia could never make a decent wife. He disparaged her good looks. There were too many good-looking women, he protested, whose husbands had the worst of the bargain. Then Jack flew into a passion and declined to discuss the subject any more. The crisis was unprecedented in the family annals. Jack and his father had never had a real quarrel before, and this quarrel was a desperate one. Jack was in an implacable mood. His father's rough phrases had stung him to the quick. He would never, Lady Eugenia felt certain, give in. Could it be expected that he should? Many evil things had befallen Sir Adrian, but that his son should leave the house in open rebellion! What might not happen next?

Lady Eugenia betook herself nervously to the delicate task of reconciliation; but Sir Adrian was not easy to be reconciled.

‘She is Isabella’s *protégée*, her creature,’ he said in stubborn tones,—‘Isabella, my worst enemy and Jack’s.’

‘She has broken with Isabella,’ cried his wife; ‘she has given up everything sooner than submit to her schemes. What could she do more? Lydia, who is a good wife, you will admit, is delighted with her. Pray, Adrian, do not put yourself in the wrong with the best, the most loyal son that ever lived. Life would be unendurable to me.’

The result of Lady Eugenia’s diplomacy was that Jack succeeded in obtaining his father’s consent to his engagement, and that, a few days later, several luggage-vans were despatched, loaded with a goodly supply of Chippendale chairs and tables, which had been for years wasting their sweetness in the lumber-rooms of Huntsham, and were now destined for the embellishment of Jack’s quarters in the Museum. Sir Adrian was reconciled to the idea of Olivia as a daughter-

in-law. It had been decreed in the family councils that Jack was now to become a married man as soon as the Fates, who sway the female heart, permitted that delightful consummation. Everything now depended on the Fates and on Olivia.

CHAPTER XLV

LAST DAYS AT HUNTSHAM

‘Of all the paths which lead to woman’s heart,
Pity’s the straightest.’

OLIVIA had now for a year had her home at Mrs. Hazelden’s. The silent flow of uneventful months, none of which brought change or cheerfulness to the situation, was at last interrupted by a crisis, sufficiently acute to mark a new departure. One day Mrs. Hazelden came into Olivia’s room in unusual excitement, with a letter in her hand. ‘I have had agitating news this morning,’ she said. ‘A purchaser has been found for Huntsham; in a few days, my brother writes, the sale will be completed. If I wish to visit

my old home once more, I must go at once. I mean to go to-day, to say good-bye to the place I love best on earth. I am weak about it, I know, Olivia ; but it grieves me to the quick. It is hard on us all. It has been a dear, dear home. I love it more than I knew I did, more, I suppose, than a reasonable being ought ; anyhow, it is going !’

‘And Jack !’ cried Olivia ; ‘he will mind it dreadfully. What a sacrifice ! He was right to do it, was he not ? but how hard it seems !’

‘He was right,’ said Mrs. Hazelden, ‘if the honest, the chivalrous thing is the right one, which sometimes I begin to doubt. Jack is chivalrous to the core—the soul of honour. Such men come off badly in the world. Fancy him and his father without a home !’

The tears stood in Mrs. Hazelden’s eyes. Her lips trembled. She spoke in broken tones. She was greatly moved. Olivia had

never seen this sturdy woman so little mistress of herself. For once her habitual stoicism failed her.

‘It is cruel for you all,’ said Olivia, sitting down by her companion; ‘a dreadful loss. I can share it. I have such pleasant memories of Huntsham. What happy visits I have paid there as a child! It was there the great good fortune of my life befell me—Lady Heriot’s friendship.’

‘Dear mother!’ said Mrs. Hazelden; ‘it is well that she is in her grave. It would have broken her heart. She loved the old place. How fond she was of you, Olivia!’

‘She was very good to me,’ said Olivia; ‘my life with her was delightful; it is delightful to remember. How happy my father used to be with Sir Adrian! Ah, if one could only have those dear people, those happy days again!’

‘Come, come,’ cried Mrs. Hazelden, ‘do not let us be sentimental. I must go about

my housekeeping. My train goes at twelve. What is the good of looking back? As for you, Olivia, you are too young for such wishes. You must look forward. Life is full of promise to you—promise of happiness. You are happy here, are you not?’

‘Most happy,’ said Olivia, with emphasis—‘most happy, and most grateful to the best of friends. I should be a wretch if I were not. Yet I am often sad, I do not know why. I miss my father dreadfully: no one can ever be what he was to me. Sometimes I think my loss grows worse to me as time goes on. Now you are in trouble; it grieves me. Life is a bad business, is it not?’

‘No,’ said Mrs. Hazelden, getting up resolutely and turning to Olivia as she prepared to leave the room, ‘not to the young, the hopeful, the courageous. Take courage, Olivia, I prophesy a life of happiness for you.’

‘Kind prophetess!’ said Olivia; ‘you fulfil your own prophecy. You give me what you promise. But when you are sad I must be sad too.’

Mrs. Hazelden stood looking at Olivia for some seconds, with eyes of tender scrutiny, as if debating something with herself. Then her resolution was formed. ‘Would you like to come with me to Huntsham?’ she said; ‘you may if you will. It is a family gathering. We shall like to have you.’

‘But’—said Olivia in hesitating tones——

‘You need feel no “buts,”’ said Mrs. Hazelden; ‘I have an express invitation to you from Eugenia.’

‘You have?’ cried Olivia, to whom this intelligence seemed—she had not time to think why—to stir a slumbering world of thoughts within her to sudden life. ‘I should like it above everything. You are sure that I shall not be in the way?’

‘I am sure,’ said Mrs. Hazelden; ‘you will be welcome, Olivia, most welcome—the last guest the Heriots will ever have in their old home. It is cruel to take you. It will be a dismal scene.’

‘Then,’ said Olivia, ‘I will share it with you. Let me come.’

The scene at Huntsham was, in truth, sufficiently dismal. However much we discount our troubles by anticipation, their actual arrival has a grimness of its own. Sir Adrian had been for years dreaming about the sale of Huntsham, talking about it, preparing the way for it. He had figured it a hundred times in fancy, but he had never known how much it would cost him to realise it in actual fact. He was now dreadfully cast down, too dejected to maintain the outward semblance of cheerfulness or to ignore the disaster which was befalling himself and his household. The Heriots, as a family, were ended. The house which

had been their home, the outward and visible sign of all that an old family means, the centre of so many interests, the symbol of so many sentiments, was to pass away—its soul extinct, its traditions outraged, its poetry forgotten—to a strange owner, who would regard it simply as so much mere brick and mortar, the equivalent of so many thousand pounds—whose only questions about it would be whether he had bought it sufficiently cheap, and how it might be best improved. Sir Adrian's soul sank in sorrow and abasement at the thought. The blow had fallen at last. It was in vain to dissimulate ; it was a disaster.

Olivia was greatly impressed by all she saw at Huntsham. The heroism of these good, brave people, the framework of whose outer life seemed crumbling all around them—their dignity, their calmness, their submission struck her as noble, pathetic. It had an almost tragic grandeur, a tragic

sadness. Sir Adrian, in the midst of his troubles, showed all the fine courtesy of his earlier days. He was awaiting them in the hall as the carriage drove up, as picturesque, as striking a figure as any of the older generations of Heriots who graced the walls around him. He looked, Olivia thought, the ideal of a brave gentleman amid the blows of fate, whose fortunes are at a low ebb, but whose honour is unstained, his fortitude unshaken. Trouble had told upon him. His hair had grown white: some lines of care were written on his brow, his form was somewhat bent, as of one who bowed beneath life's heavy burthen. He looked grave, broken, sad; but he was gentleness itself. Olivia felt the tears rush to her eyes as he held her hand and bade her welcome. 'You have grown very like your mother,' he said, 'and you have your father's eyes! Poor Hillyard, I wish I had him here just now! I am glad, at any rate,

to have his child.' Lady Eugenia was as tender to Olivia as in old times, more tender, perhaps. Her kiss of welcome had a special warmth, as if it meant to convey a message of love. The house was in some disorder, for the arrangements for dismantling it were already in hand, but Olivia's comforts as a guest were well provided for. 'You are to have your old room, Olivia,' Lady Eugenia said, as they went upstairs. 'I thought you would like it. I will come with you. How sweet the garden looks from the window, does it not? The little girls have decked the table with flowers in honour of our dear guest.'

The room seemed just as she remembered it years before. Everything was so familiar, so dear, so sad. Every one was being kind to her. Olivia's heart was full.

Jack, whom they found when they went to dinner, played his part manfully. He behaved to his father with deference, and

surrendered without a struggle to arguments which at another time would have stirred the combatant within him. But Jack's heart was too sore to wrangle. Sir Adrian remained master of an undisputed field. Lady Eugenia found herself being delightfully cared for. Jack was always petting her. No one who had watched him would have guessed that he had signed away his heritage, and was in the act of losing it.

The occasion, Olivia felt, was one which justified outspokenness. How, at such a time, amid such friends, lock up one's real feelings, and check the natural, spontaneous flow of sympathy and kindness? All hearts were aching with a common sorrow. Each was feeling for the rest. Each wished to lighten his companion's load. In such an atmosphere it is difficult, it would be incongruous, not to become confidential. Olivia was longing to help, to cheer, to console. Who could stand in need of greater consola-

tion than Jack did, or could better deserve to be consoled? Olivia, with pardonable disregard of all but the necessities of the moment, devoted herself to the congenial task of consolation. Lady Eugenia fanned the flame. Jack was no longer a forbidden topic in her talks with Olivia. She was fervent in her praises of his unselfishness. His mother might well be proud of such a son. She stood on the terrace one morning, her eyes full of tears, watching Jack, his father leaning on his arm, as they strolled beneath the lime trees. 'He is the best of sons,' she said, 'and the best of men. The misfortune is his far more than ours. Our day is nearly done. We have lived our lives here. But for Jack! see how he takes it! I set him against a thousand misfortunes and am thankful.' In such a mood, could Olivia show reluctance when, morning after morning, Jack tempted her to come with him and visit many a familiar spot, dear to the

recollections of them both? Together they wandered across the park, and through the woods, and down to the little stream which had formed the boundary of their childhood's rambles. It was sad, but yet a pleasant sort of sadness. Here they had played as boy and girl. Here was the elm which Jack, in school-boy pride, had climbed to perilous heights, while Olivia stood below in awe-struck admiration at her companion's prowess. Here was the lane where they had wasted so many delicious afternoons! Wasted, indeed! What afternoons in after-life had ever been, could ever be, half as well employed? for were they not fragrant still with a thousand pleasant associations, and tuneful with sweet sounds that it was a joy to remember?

Olivia felt a tender pity take possession of her soul. It clamoured for expression. She would be prude no longer. She would tell the truth; she would say what she was feeling — be the consequences what they

might. Jack, charmed with Olivia's melting mood, was busy with a hundred pleasant memories. 'Those were good days, Olivia,' he cried, 'were they not? too good to last or to return. They come but once in a lifetime, people tell us; well, it is something to have had them once. They were the happiest of my life.'

'And of mine,' said Olivia, by this time in no mood to weigh her words; 'I have never been so happy since. I am often sad now—very sad to-day, Jack, because of your troubles. I have wanted to tell you. You bear it nobly.'

'You make them easy to bear,' said Jack; 'you are the best of consolers, the best and the kindest. Despite of everything, you have made these last days at Huntsham very happy ones. I shall never forget them.'

Olivia went back to the house a happy woman—happier, more at peace, than she

had ever felt. Things around her looked gloomy, but an inward voice was whispering to her to be of good cheer. Happiness for her, for Jack, was close at hand. The night was dark; but already the horizon was beginning to glow with rosy harbingers of coming dawn. The occasion was a sad one, romantically sad: her dear friends were suffering; but Olivia had become conscious of something which forbade her to be sad, which filled her soul with joy, exultation, rapture—something which she had resolutely thrust away from sight and buried deep in the recesses of her heart. Now it would be ignored no more. There was no doubt this time, no misgiving, no room for hesitation. She had found the man she loved!

How smoothly, in such circumstances, does the course of wooing flow! How easy to reveal that which it has cost so much effort, so much suffering to hide, even, if possible, from oneself! What bootless effort,

what unnecessary pain! That evening, as Jack and Olivia wandered about the moss-grown Huntsham paths, and watched the last lights of a sweet June day fading out of the sky, how natural it seemed that, almost before they knew, Jack's long-cherished passion should find utterance, and that Olivia should need but gentle compulsion to own that he was master of her heart. It was the old story of their childhood over again—deeper, stronger, sweeter than before. 'I have had the heart-ache for a dozen years!' cried Jack; 'now, come what mishaps may, I am the happiest of men, the happiest, the most fortunate! How often I have walked about these woods, building castles in the air, or oftener railing against Fortune because my castle would not build itself the way I wished! I used to love to dream that this dear old place would, one day, be your home. It seemed a sort of consecration of it.'

‘I too have had day-dreams and a heart-ache,’ said Olivia; ‘I have been miserable, sometimes, and hopeless. I am thankful that that part of life is done. I tried to believe that happiness could be found elsewhere than where my heart bade me find it. Now, at last, I am perfectly happy—happy and at peace.’

The sun had set; the west was all aglow with a soft dying glory; one star after another looked out faintly from a darkening sky; the exquisite dewy cool of summer evening was falling on meadow and woodland, refreshing the world after the long day’s blaze. A nightingale was pouring out a full flood of song from the neighbouring thicket. All things seemed at peace, best peace of all in two young lovers’ hearts, to whom the world has suddenly become a palace of enchantment. ‘My true life,’ cried Jack, as they turned homewards, ‘begins to-night—

“The last step has brought me to my love,
And there I'll rest, as, after much turmoil,
A blessed soul doth in Elysium”—

See, there is my father. Let us go and tell him.'

It was not, however, destined that the pleasant announcement should be made just then. Sir Adrian met them with a troubled face. 'I have had very bad news from your Uncle Valentine,' he said; 'Antinous is dangerously ill.'

CHAPTER XLVI

THE BEGINNING OF TROUBLES

‘Though the mills of God grind slowly,
Yet they grind exceeding small.’

THINGS were going badly with Valentine and his wife. Isabella Heriot was beginning to find that the pleasures of life were fast losing their flavour. Its excitements would stimulate no longer. With the ill-gotten wealth that her mother-in-law's codicil had brought, leanness had entered into her soul, leanness and bitterness—the leanness of satiated desire, the bitterness of disappointed hope. Society had no more to give her in the way of enjoyment. She had climbed as high as she could go, and found no such rapture as

that which she had looked up to from below. Rather the air was harsh, the breeze chilly, the mountain-side steep and slippery ; it was hard to advance, easy to fall. In a long list of acquaintances, whose acquisition had cost her so many days and nights of toil, Isabella Heriot told herself bitterly that she had not a single friend. Her husband was less to her than ever. He had never forgiven her the estrangement from his brother which her behaviour had occasioned. Valentine in his earlier days had wished for the money, he had wanted it. He now wanted reconciliation with his brother and his family. The estrangement was costing him more than he had bargained for. Sir Adrian's haughty politeness, when, once or twice, they had met for business matters, cut him to the quick. Huntsham was a closed house to him and his wife. His sister Lydia would have nothing to do with either of them. Many of Valentine's friends, too, espoused Sir Adrian's

side, and looked coldly on Isabella's fine dinners and crowded receptions. For himself, Valentine was thoroughly tired of them and of Isabella too. He had known from the first that she was a bad companion for a *tête-à-tête*. There was no love, no pretence of love; and the feelings which had once done duty for love had turned to something near dislike. So Valentine and his wife went their different ways with exterior politeness to each other, but each with a secret resentment, each with ever-lessening esteem, each with hearts which daily grew darker and colder, as new incongruities came to light and indifference ripened into hate. He made no secret of his dulness, and a dull man easily becomes morose. If he frequented parties as assiduously as ever, it was not that they amused him, but because husband and wife had accepted the bitter truth that anything was better than one another's society. Valentine had learnt to think of his home

with a shudder, for there—close by the sacred hearth, at the household table, beside the nuptial couch—sat the dread demon of *ennui*, master of the situation.

Another source of disturbance to Mrs. Heriot's domestic peace was the fact, which became daily more apparent, that Malcolm's health was breaking down. Little Antinous was fast approaching the age when he would require a more educated companion. But the idea of Malcolm quitting the household altogether had never been entertained. She was devoted to the child, and he to her. It would have been cruelty to separate them; and cruelty to Antinous was to Mrs. Heriot an unimaginable crime. The child, always her idol, became dearer to her as other pleasures lost their charm. He, at least, never disappointed; his mother found in his increasing attractions a balm for all her disappointments. Malcolm managed him better than any one. Nor was this all. Her

strength of character, her Puritanic earnestness, her Scotch piety, her strong unswerving loyalty to Mrs. Heriot, her impassioned affection for the child, her long services, extending back to the days when Isabella was a girl—gave her a special position in the household, made her a privileged person. She did many things for Antinous which his mother was glad to be excused from doing. She taught him her own gloomy creed ; she talked to him of the things which fascinate and awe a child's imagination ; she bade him, above all things, be sure that his heart was right with God, his conscience free from sin. The child spent his life with her, for Mrs. Heriot's plan of existence left little leisure for the sort of intercourse which children need, nor had she any aptitude for it. No one in the Heriot household could fill Malcolm's place ; and now it was obvious that she was failing. Once the calmest, most composed, most imperturbable of mortals, going her

way, unmoved by external influences, she was now the victim of moods, or, rather, of one despairing mood. A profound melancholy had settled upon her ; she was never happy, never cheerful ; she went about her business as in a day-dream ; her physical powers grew daily less. Her nerves were shattered ; she had become an old woman. Mrs. Valentine watched her and made up her mind that she was the victim of some mortal disease. Doctors, however, failed to discover any cause, and could indicate nothing more distinct than want of tone. Malcolm took her tonics submissively, protested that there was nothing the matter with her but old age, and grew pale and haggard, as though the Furies were driving her to her doom.

It was a fine June ; the heat was great. London glowed like a spent furnace ; Antinous began to flag. He was pale, listless, and evidently required country air. Valentine was tied to the City. Mrs. Heriot had

various engagements which she did not choose to miss. Nurse and child accordingly were despatched to Mrs. Heriot's home, where Antinous was always a welcome guest. There he was to await his parents' arrival for a summer visit. Valentine was sharing a moor with some friends, and in the middle of August they would all start for Scotland.

Malcolm was thankful to escape to the country. The heat and airlessness of London was killing her. She longed for cool and quiet. She would get better now, she felt. The dewy, noiseless nights at the Pines, the great vault of heaven slowly, in majestic silence, wheeling overhead, were the remedy of which she stood in need. Her parents were still alive, privileged pensioners in one of Mr. Goldingham's model cottages. Her sister Maggie had just returned from India and was now at home, a married woman with a little child. Malcolm longed to be with her kinsfolk once again ; she wept passionately

as she threw herself into her old mother's arms. Maggie was horrified at her sister's looks. The sturdy, self-contained, determined woman was gone. She was but the wreck of her former self.

It was a blazing summer. There was nothing to be done but to sit in the shade under the beech trees in the park. Here Maggie would come with her little son, and the two women would sit chatting while the children played about together, Antinous perfectly happy in having found that supreme desideratum of childhood, a playmate. One day Antinous complained of thirst; the two children asked to be allowed to go to the cottage for a drink of water. It was against rules to go into any of the cottages, but old Malcolm's cottage was proverbial for its spotless purity. He himself, a hale old man of eighty, was a standing proof of the absence of every unhealthy influence. It was but a hundred yards from where they sate. The children

begged hard and Malcolm gave them leave to go.

Antinous presently came back refreshed and delighted. Old Malcolm had received him hospitably, had given him a delicious cool drink of water and a piece of Scotch cake. He had prattled to the children of the long-ago days when Master Antinous's mamma was just such another little person as he was now, and used to come and pay him and his old lady a visit and eat cake just as he was doing.

A few days later Malcolm, coming with Antinous to the usual meeting-place under the beeches, found no one there. She went on to her father's cottage to ascertain the cause. She found her sister and mother in great distress. The little child was ill, and getting worse hour by hour. He complained of his throat, and was evidently suffering greatly. The doctor arrived presently and pronounced it a case of diphtheria. Malcolm,

when she heard it, gave a groan of horror. She felt a dire presentiment of evil; she knew that judgment was about to fall. She locked herself in her room, fell on her knees, prayed passionately, wildly, despairingly, that it might fall on her, not on an innocent victim. But what avail the prayers of guilty souls, even to assuage their own apprehensions? What avails the sacrifice when the sacrificer's hand is stained with guilt? Malcolm, even while she prayed, felt a conviction that Heaven was deaf, and that her prayer would not be granted. Two days later she learnt that her sister's child was dead. Presently Antinous began to sicken. Malcolm's heart stood still with horror. She caught the child to her arms in a paroxysm of grief and terror. 'My God,' she cried, 'spare him, spare him! Strike me! Punish me as I deserve, but not the child! Anything but that!'

CHAPTER XLVII

A CONFESSION

‘*Mac.* Cure her of that.

Canst thou not minister to a mind diseas’d,
Pluck from the memory a rooted sorrow,
Raze out the written troubles of the brain
And with some sweet oblivious antidote
Cleanse the stuff’d bosom of the perilous stuff
Which weighs upon the heart?’

DESPITE Malcolm’s prayers—despite assiduous nursing—despite the famous specialist who arrived, next morning, with Mrs. Heriot, Antinous grew steadily worse. Isabella, who had never had a real sorrow before, was beside herself with terror, fury, despair. ‘Those,’ says George Eliot, ‘who have been indulged by fortune, and have always thought of calamity as what happens to others, feel a

blind, incredulous rage at the reversal of their lot, and half believe that their wild cries will alter the course of the storm.' Mrs. Heriot's cries were wild and fierce. She turned on Malcolm like a wild animal, the savage mother who sees her offspring torn from her. There was no question as to where and how the malady had been caught. Malcolm had received positive orders to take the child to no cottage. She had chosen to disobey, the child was dying in consequence. 'You are his murderess, his murderess!' Mrs. Heriot cried in her despair.

'Murderess!' cried Malcolm; 'you know well that I would die to save him. I would give my soul for him.'

'You have killed him!' burst out Mrs. Heriot. 'His blood is on your head: you have killed him. It will kill me. Die for him, did you say? You sacrificed him to your own amusement; you broke your word to me. You have killed him.'

Malcolm's ashy lips trembled, but could fashion no reply. Her mistress's words fell like lashes on the shuddering flesh. She sat looking at her in a silent agony.

'Do not look at me like that,' cried Mrs. Heriot; 'you have an evil eye. What are you thinking?'

'I am thinking,' said the other, 'of something I have felt all the morning. I could not be sure that it was not fancy. But it was no fancy. I have not nursed Antinous for nothing. I have diphtheria myself. I am certain of it. I knew all along that I should catch it. Now, perhaps, you will forgive me.'

Isabella Heriot instinctively drew back; but there was no forgiveness, no pity in her tones. 'You shall nurse him no longer; you are his murderess!'

'Murderess!' cried the other, half frantic; 'you little know what I have done for him, for you! Take care what you drive me to!'

‘Do not rave like a mad woman,’ said her mistress. ‘Stay where you are. The doctor will come to you.’

The doctor pronounced Malcolm’s illness to be unquestionably diphtheria. It was a serious case; her weak health, her low vitality, her despondent mood, made her a bad subject. She was ill equipped for a life-struggle. Malcolm watched the doctor’s grave face. She gave a groan of horror.

‘Ah!’ she cried, ‘I knew it. I shall die! I dare not! I will not! God help me! He is punishing me for my sin, my grievous sin. It has been my torture ever since. Now He has stricken the child, and stricken me! It was for the child’s sake that I did it, and it has been in vain. I must repent before I die. May God forgive me!’

‘Do not alarm yourself,’ said the doctor, taking a mental note of the extreme nervousness of his patient, ‘and show a little forti-

tude. If you wish to recover, that is the way to do it. You are in God's hand, remember.'

Malcolm gave a shudder.

'I remember it,' she said, 'only too well. There is no comfort to me in that.'

The next day Antinous was sinking fast. Mrs. Malcolm grew seriously worse. The doctor came from the bedside, where Antinous now lay almost *in extremis*. He found the sick woman in an agony of terror.

'Am I worse?' she demanded with passionate eagerness. 'Can I not recover? I am a strong woman. I never ailed before; my family is a long-lived one. Surely you can save me! For the love of God, save me, save me!'

'These cases are always dangerous,' said the doctor; 'but you must really keep calm. Have you anything on your mind?'

'Yes,' said Malcolm; 'a great sin is on

my mind. It is crushing me. I am a sinful woman, and dying in my sin. Save me, save me at any cost. I do not mind pain. Is there nothing I can undergo ?’

‘I will send the clergyman to you, if you please,’ said the doctor. ‘Perhaps he will calm you. I can do no more for you.’

‘I wish to tell you,’ said the woman. ‘Look, please, in my box ; at the bottom you will find a sheet of paper. It is Lady Heriot’s last codicil. I signed it, and my sister Maggie signed it. She is here now, and can tell you all. I have concealed it till now. I have been guilty ; but my guilt was not to benefit myself.’

The doctor read the paper : ‘I revoke the codicil which I was constrained to sign this afternoon. Let my will stand.’

‘Those are the words,’ said Malcolm ; ‘she bade me write them. I was nursing her that night. She could not sleep. She kept talking to herself. “I will not do it,”

she said. "Adrian wants it sorely. Antinous will be rich enough. Isabella forced me." At last she bade me bring paper and write to her dictation, then to call my sister, who was sleeping in the next room. Then we both saw her sign, and signed ourselves. She put it under the pillow. After her seizure the pillow was displaced, the paper slipped to the floor. I picked it up. No one had seen it. I knew that it meant ruin to Antinous. It has been in my box ever since. Maggie is here, and will tell you. May God forgive me !'

'I must tell Mr. Heriot, of course,' said the doctor.

'He must be told,' said the dying woman with a groan.

'Shall I give him the paper ?'

'Never !' cried Malcolm ; 'give it to no one but Sir Adrian.'

Maggie put her sister's story beyond dispute. She remembered the occurrence,

recognised the paper and the signatures. She had not been aware of its importance, and had never thought of it till now; but her recollection was distinct. That evening little Antinous died.

CHAPTER XLVIII

EVENING LIGHTS

‘Deus nobis hæc otia fecit.’

NOTHING in all the changes which Malcolm's disclosures had brought about in his position and prospects gave Sir Adrian more heart-felt satisfaction than the way in which his brother Valentine behaved. The two brothers had always at heart been longing for reconciliation. Each really loved the other. Both had grieved under the estrangement. Valentine had smarted under the stern sentence which banished him from the home, which, as years went on and the world's ambitions lost something of their attractiveness, was, he found, dearer to him

than most things in life. In ordinary circumstances Sir Adrian might have found it hard to forgive, Valentine to accept forgiveness; but now a tragic sorrow bent both hearts in submission and linked them in sympathy.

Sir Adrian, standing over little Antinous's coffin, and watching his brother's haggard look of grief, could only seize his hand and seal an unspoken treaty of forgiveness. All was forgotten but the calamity which had shipwrecked the happiness, the hopes of one of them, and had turned the schemes, the labours, the ambitions of life to a hollow mockery, a ghastly comment on the vanity of human wishes. In that little coffin lay the object of all Valentine's busy life, his eager contrivance, his restless energy. For him he had toiled, for him he had plotted, for him he had sacrificed things once dear to him, which only so transcendent a sacrifice could claim. He had silenced conscience;

he had tampered with honour ; he had forfeited his friends' esteem, his brother's love. Now all was over. Nothing remained to wish, to hope, to labour for. Valentine spoke to Sir Adrian with perfect frankness about the money. 'It would all have been Jack's one day,' he said, 'for, of course, as matters stand, I should have left all to him ; to whom should I leave it ? But I am glad that this part of it is yours at once, Adrian. I give you my honour I am glad to be rid of it : it weighed on my soul. I have never been happy since I got it. It has been a curse to me. It has brought me a curse. Now that it is gone, I may hope to be forgiven. You forgive me, at any rate ?'

'And you must forgive me,' said Sir Adrian, in the kind frank tones which Valentine remembered as closing many a boyish quarrel ; 'I need forgiveness, God knows. I have been wrong, very wrong. I know it. I confess it humbly. I have

nursed my rage and thought about you like a brute. Forgive me, Valentine. Pray God forgive us both. I am thankful to be friends again. Dear brother, to my heart's core I sorrow for your loss.'

.

One other scene, a farewell scene, before the cares, joys, and sorrows of the Heriots fade from us into the gloom. A year has passed, and it is summer again, and Jack and Olivia—by this time wearing the dignities of an experienced married pair—have left their quarters in the Museum for a holiday at Jack's old home. Dr. Crucible has arrived for a Sunday in the country. The sacred rites of five-o'clock tea are in course of celebration under the great cedar on the lawn.

A year of prosperity had done wonders for Sir Adrian and his wife. Sir Adrian stood upright again, as a man should who has paid off his mortgages, owes no one a shilling, and is rich enough not to care if a

farm or two more or less remains unlet. Lady Eugenia, relieved from her husband's anxieties and Jack's love troubles, and rejoicing in a daughter-in-law whom she found every day more congenial to her taste, had blossomed into a serenity and good-nature which proved how heavily her former cares had weighed upon her spirits. Olivia makes a perfect daughter of the house. She has now gone to summon Dr. Crucible from the library, where he had been suspiciously quiet for the last hour and a half. The two are coming, arm in arm, across the lawn to join the rest. 'A siesta?' said Sir Adrian; 'we were obliged to disturb you; Olivia wants to give you a cup of tea.'

'Base insinuation,' cried the doctor, showing a volume which he was holding in his hand; 'I have been too well employed. There is excellent good reading in the library. I lighted on a volume of Emerson. What do you think of this piece of philosophy?'

And then the doctor read—

“Meanwhile life wears on and ministers to you, no doubt, as to me, its undying and grand lessons, its uncontainable, endless poetry, its short dry prose of scepticism, its veins of cold air in the evening woods, quickly swallowed by the wide warmth of June, its steady correction of the rashness and short sight of youthful judgment, and its pure repairs of all the rents and seeming ruin it operates in what it gave : although we love the first gift so well that we cling to the ruin and think we will be cold to the new if the new shall come. But the new steals on us, like a star, which rises behind our back as we walk, and we are borrowing gladly its light before we know the benefactor. So be it with you, with me, with all.”

‘I join in that prayer,’ said Sir Adrian.
‘My good star rose late, but it lends a kindly light, and is leading me by pleasant paths.
May it shine upon us all.’

THE END

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